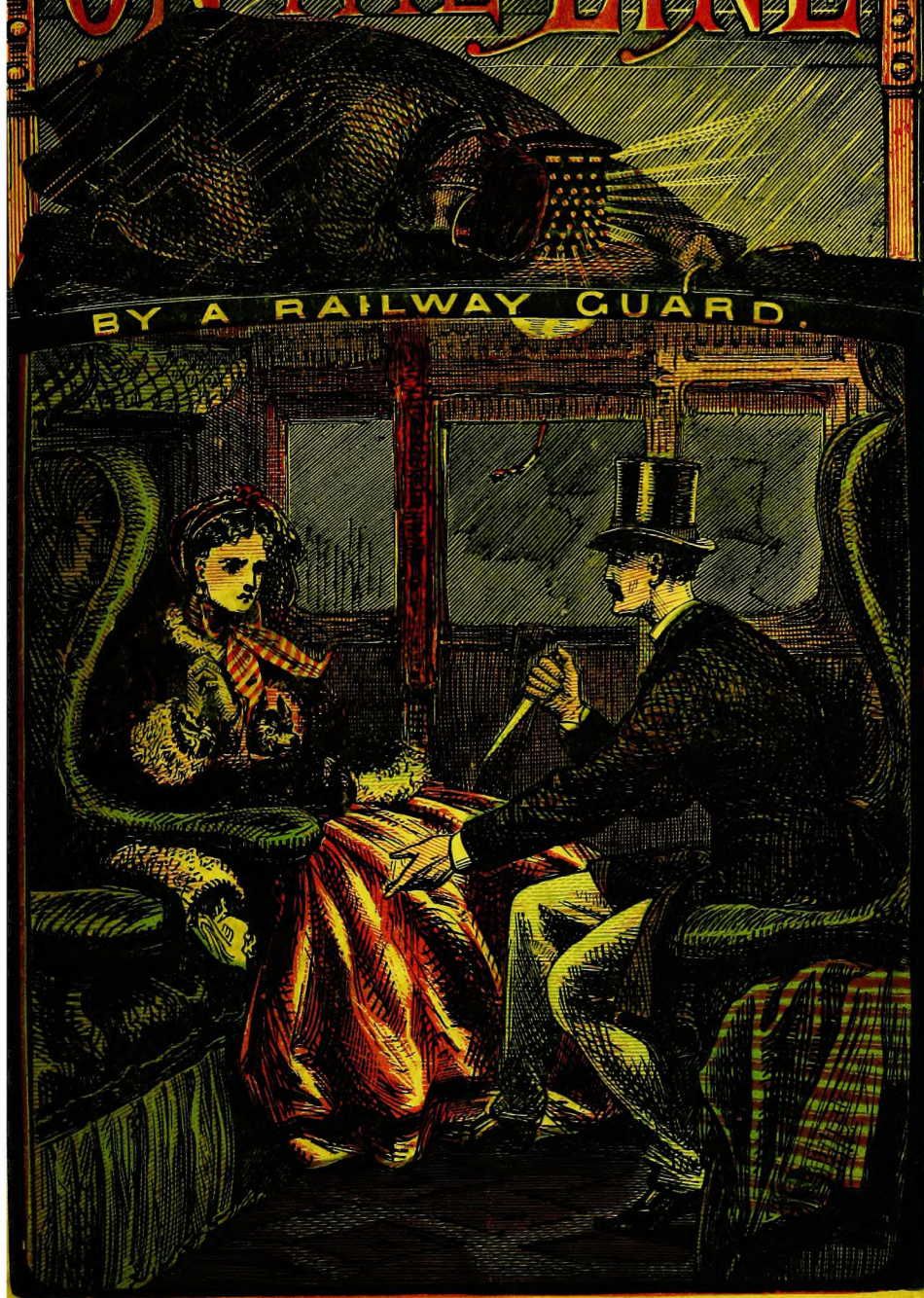


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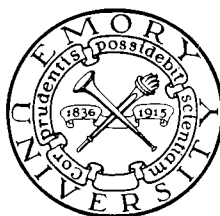
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INTRODUCTION.

It is now almost two years since Mr. Haseldine, the chairman of the "South Western and all that part of England Railway," came to me and said, "Dawkins, it is about time, my man, for you to think of going on the shelf. Our Railway is one of the oldest in the kingdom, and you have been on it since its formation. You are getting old, Dawkins."

With a melancholy sigh and a grave shake of the head, I was constrained by candour, inherent in my composition, to admit the dismal fact.

"Now, it's all very well," continued our worthy chairman, "to talk about being game, and dying in harness; but it's my opinion, Dawkins, that you require rest and ease, so that you may pass your old age in peace and quietness."

"Have you any fault to find with me, sir?" I asked, feeling a little anxious upon the good-conduct point.

"None whatever. Disabuse your mind of that supposition. A better man never worked a railway, and we shall go a long way before we meet with so good a guard. Understand that, Dawkins."

Everybody called me Dawkins, I may observe in a parenthesis. Whether I ever had a christian name, is a question for my respected mother, together with my godfathers and godmothers to determine, but as they have, all excellent souls, long since gone to their rest, I am afraid little light can be thrown upon the matter. No one thought of calling me anything else

but Dawkins. I even used to sign my name **Dawkins**, just as if I had been a peer of the realm, and the owner of thousands.

I bowed in reply to the compliment paid me by Mr. Haseldine, and waited for him to go on with his judicious remarks, which I felt would elucidate the mysterious problem of my future.

"We propose, Dawkins," continued Mr. Haseldine, "that is, my fellow Directors and I, propose to allow you to retire now upon a pension, which, in recognition of your long and valuable services, will be equivalent to two-thirds of your full pay at this moment, which you must admit is handsome."

"So it is, sir," I answered with a submissiveness all my own. "But I could have wished to continue in the service of the South Western until the gentleman with the scythe began to interfere actively in my behalf."

"That desire does you credit, Dawkins," said our valued chairman. "It is just the sort of speech I expected from a man like yourself, having such a character as that we shall give you. You must remember that there are younger men, able and willing to work, and that room must be made for them. You have had your day, and have acquitted yourself admirably, let that suffice."

"It shall, sir, since you wish it. Is there anything else that you wish to

"There is one thing, and that is most important, and it will, I have no doubt, be highly interesting to yourself."

On hearing this, I confess that I raised my eyes with a curiosity foreign to my nature

"A very benevolent lady, long a shareholder in our Company," said Mr. Haseldine, "departed this life a few months back, leaving a certain sum of money to be applied to the purchase of a plot of ground near London, and the erection thereon of five and twenty houses, which are to be presented to such pensioners of the Company as may desire to live in them. These houses

will be ready for the reception of their inmates in three days from this time, and it has been resolved that you, Dawkins, shall have the first choice, twenty-four other servants of the Company following in order of merit. They will be plainly furnished. You will have neither rent or taxes to pay, and upon your pension you will be able to live comfortably, if not luxuriously."

"May I ask the name of this lady, sir," I said, while a tear trembled in my eye.

"You may. The name is Marriott."

"Then, God bless her! that's all I have to say. God bless her."

Seeing that I was affected, Mr. Haseldine touched me gently on the shoulder, uttered a few kind words, and walked away from the platform, leaving me the prey of mingled emotions.

I was then upwards of sixty years of age, and, if the truth must be told, becoming a little shaky. After some reflection, the idea of giving up work, and living in the little town erected by the bounty of Miss Marriott, surrounded by my friends and fellow workers, was not so distasteful as it had appeared at first.

At length the day arrived: I with twenty-four others received our discharge in a formal manner, and went down in a special train to the little village of Barking, in the vicinity of which the houses were erected. Quite an interesting ceremony was organized by the directors and sundry members of the Marriott family. A volunteer band officiated on the occasion, and an excellent dinner was given us (self in the chair), Mr. Haseldine, vice.

This dinner was given in the large room of the neighbouring inn, built at a moment's notice by an enterprising man, who saw his way to profit, if not to make a fortune. It was within a stone's-throw of the houses, and rejoiced in the sign of "The Royal Mail."

The proprietor had been a commercial traveller, but had

decided upon investing his capital and going into beer, in his old age. To do him justice, I will say that he had a most profound respect, amounting almost to veneration, for railways, and those who work them. His name was Tench, and as he is still in the flesh, I hope he will pardon me for giving publicity to his monosyllabic patronymic.

The ceremony of inauguration or installation, I forget which it was called in the newspaper, passed off admirably next day, and in less than a week we all settled down and began to like our new way of living.

Our principal amusement was meeting in the evening at the Royal Mail, under the presidency of Mr. Tench, who placed his large room at our disposal. Smoking unexceptionable tobacco, and drinking such malt liquor, and such spirits as can be obtained at few houses in the kingdom, is not a difficult way for an old man to pass the evening, especially when he is surrounded by friendly faces. But it was universally admitted that a gap existed. It remained for Mr. Tench to point out in what direction that gap lay, and how it might be filled up.

"Gentlemen," said he one evening in the early part of November, knocking with his knuckles upon the table to ensure that silence to which as president he was entitled; "Gentlemen, it has occurred to me, and I believe also to my worthy friend, Mr. Dawkins, that although the traffic works smoothly enough, and we pay a good dividend, there is a plate loose somewhere. I wont pretend to say that I am right, for, in comparison to you, I am what a 'goods' is to an 'express.'"

"No, No!"

"But I say, yes; now I think we should go along better if we oiled our wheels with a little palaver in the story-telling way. You must have seen many strange things, and have gone through many strange adventures; what I propose is, that those gentlemen who are willing shall relate, to such of the company

as, like myself, are willing to live and learn and be amused by any peculiarly striking passage in their lives."

This brilliant idea was at once received with acclamation. There is nothing a veteran likes so much as to recount his exploits to a circle of congenial and willing listeners. The pensioned *employées* of the "South Western" met the next night at the Royal Mail, and it so happened that I was called upon to relate the first story, which with some reluctance, not being altogether prepared, I did.

The following collection of stories are some of those that were told during the long winter evenings in Mr. Tench's club-room, and they have been put together by the unanimous desire of the narrators and their friends, hoping that the public, who patronize railways so universally, may appreciate the simple facts, plain and unvarnished, which form passages in the lives of those who have for many years assisted to conduct and manage an important branch of the material portion of the social fabric.

The rough retailer of these stories of life "On the Line" is

The reader's obedient Servant,

"DAWKINS."

ON THE LINE.



I.—THE SOUTH COAST EXPRESS.

NIGH upon ten years ago I was working the South Coast Express. You will remember the time, when I say that it was soon after the opening of the Havant line. This being a very important train, making two journeys daily, one up and one down, it was, of course, managed by two guards. I was the head guard, and James Tallmarsh, who is sitting on my left, and won't, I hope, think that I am robbing him of his story, was under me.

The South Coast Express used to leave London at half-past eight; I believe it does so now. Occasionally we were a little late in starting, owing to the non-arrival of the mail from the post-office, and I have known it full 8.35 before I was able to sound my whistle.

I don't know whether it is a feeling that has occurred to any one else, but I always am a little excited when travelling with the mail. There is more responsibility, more speed, more passengers, and an indescribable something, which I believe our French friends designate a "*Je ne sais quoi*." The usual amount of bustle was perceptible upon the platform and amongst the passengers when the five minutes' bell rang. I ran about doing my best to get things straight. Tallmarsh assisted the carriage attendants, and saw that they did their work civilly and with dispatch. I may say, without offence, that that sort of work was never much to my mind, except when a pretty young lady, or a gentleman who "looked like" half-a-crown or a shilling caught my eye, for I was never above accepting a gratuity when I knew that I could do so without attracting the attention of those who object to such a proceeding.

Just after the five minutes' bell rang, a very pretty young lady with a small dog under her arm, followed by a porter with a carpet-bag, came on the platform. She arrested my attention at once, and approaching her, I said, holding up my key, "What class, miss?"

"First," she replied, as I knew she would.

"Where to?" I continued.

"Winchester," she said, in the sweetest of voices; "and, if you please, can I have a carriage to myself? I should be so much obliged."

"I cannot promise you that," I replied; "you see this is the express, and as we never put on more carriages than we really want, the compartments are generally filled at starting. Here is one, however, which is at present quite empty. You can get in, if you like, and I will do my best to keep it for you, though it is against our orders to do so."

"Oh! I am sorry for that. I do not wish you to do anything that may get you into trouble," she said, raising her veil, and looking at me with her full lustrous blue eyes.

I could see at the first that she was beautiful, but when she raised her veil, I perceived that she was radiantly lovely. Accustomed as I was to see many good-looking ladies who travel on the South Western, I had never seen one to equal her, and I would have broken fifty rules and regulations to please her. I opened the door of a first-class carriage, and assisted her in, holding the little dog for her. It was a terrier, of the species called toy, and did not weigh half-a-dozen pounds. It was well tanned and splendidly bred, being worth thirty guineas at the least.

"Have you a dog-ticket, miss?" I asked, as I handed the little creature to her.

"No, I have not. Is it necessary for so tiny a thing?" she replied.

"I am afraid so. If you do not pay for him, most likely you will have to when you arrive at the end of your journey, unless you wrap it up carefully in your shawl."

"Then I will do that. I never have paid yet for the Lady Maud, and her ladyship shall travel for nothing now, if I can manage it. There is something for your civility, though. Perhaps the money is better in your pocket than in that of the Company."

She smiled, dividing two rows of pretty teeth, and slipped half a sovereign into my hand, adding—"Mind, I must have this carriage to myself."

I did not think that there was anything strange in this request, for my experience proved that many young ladies have the strongest possible objections to travel in a carriage filled with strange people whom they know nothing about, and whom they have never seen before. I locked the door with my key, and continued my walk up and down the platform. Half-past eight struck, and the mail-bags had not arrived. The letter-sorters were anxiously awaiting them. The steam was up, and the engine-driver stood on the step listening for the signal to start. The train was not so full as usual.

It was not a very nice night for travelling. February had just commenced, the weather was cold and raw, and a drizzling rain was falling with a pertinacity peculiar to this country. Tallmarsh had seen the luggage safely stowed in the vans and the doors locked; the passengers had all taken their seats, and the porters stood idly by the carriages. Some friends of the travellers were conversing with them at the windows, and the newspaper boy was bawling himself hoarse with a strange combination of sounds, resembling "Evening-starstannardexpressthisweekspunchglobeanteday'stimesir!"

I was holding my watch in my hand, carefully regarding the dial, when I remarked a gentleman come from the booking-office, ticket in hand. He was a tall, slim, well-made man, dark, having regular features, and a black moustache, which he incessantly caressed, as if he loved it. There was a careless air about him, which indicated that he knew the train could not start until the mails arrived, and that he was aware they had not yet made their appearance.

The doors leading into the booking-office were, or ought to have been locked at half-past eight; how this tardy wayfarer could have gained an entry I was at a loss to imagine. It was evident that he had his ticket, and that he meant to go on, so I was in the act of advancing to meet him and put him in the train, when the dash and clatter of wheels, together with the noise of horses' feet, told me that the dilatory driver had arrived with the letter-bags. In an instant all was confusion.

I lost sight of the gentleman for a moment. I saw him again walking up and down the train, peering into every carriage, as if looking for some one. I began to think him the coolest individual I had ever met with, and intended, as soon as the mails were bestowed, to start instantly, and, if possible, leave him behind, for his careless manner irritated me. He seemed determined to give trouble, if he could. Afterwards I discovered that all this mannerism was not without its object.

He did not wait till the last minute for nothing. He did not without a reason peer with his quick lynx-like eye into every carriage, and then retrace his steps as if he had not yet made up his mind which seat to take. In vain porters said to him, "Going on, sir? Take your seat, if you please." He replied, "Plenty of time, my good fellow; don't hurry me."

Tallmarsh assisted to place the large, bulky canvas-bags, filled with letters addressed to all parts of the world, in the huge vans allotted for their reception. Then he ran to the gentleman, who was standing near the carriage in which the young lady with the dog was seated.

"Now, sir!" cried Tallmarsh; "jump in, if you please."

"Put me in here, guard; open this door," he said.

"No, no; this carriage is engaged," said a childish treble, which I recognized instantly.

The remonstrance came too late. We were behind time. Tallmarsh was anxious to make a start. He had opened the door; the gentleman with the pet moustache got in. "All right up there?" Tallmarsh said to me.

I nodded my head, knowing that we had no time for an altercation, and thinking that there was no great harm, after all, in the young lady having a companion during her journey. Tallmarsh blew his whistle as a signal to the driver. In a moment the steam was turned on, the engine began to puff and pant, and we rolled slowly out of the station. Tallmarsh was in the van before me, but I joined him as the train swept past me, and shutting the door, and raising the window to keep out the wind and rain, we looked at the breaks to see that they were all right, arranged some parcels, looked at a few hampers and saw to what place they were directed, afterwards checking our way-bills, and performing the ordinary business of the journey. When this was accomplished to our satisfaction, I let down the window. A storm of wind and rain beat in, and dashed against my face. The sky was black and murky. The light from the carriages lit up a small part of the surrounding space, but at the rate at which we were going we must have flashed by like a meteor. The express was drawn by two powerful engines, and by the way in which the carriages rocked I knew that we were going "on the swing;" that is to say, we were progressing at the rate of forty-five, or from that to fifty miles an hour, and making up for lost time.

"Pull the window up, Dawkins," said Tallmarsh; "else these way-bills will all be as wet as water."

I did so, remarking "What a night! I should not care about being on the engine."

"Nor I. Those in the first class have the best time of it."

"Talking of first class," I exclaimed, "I wish you hadn't put that gentleman who came late, in with the young lady."

"Why not? What harm was there?" he asked. "She certainly said the carriage was engaged, but for my part I did not see it, and, late as we were, I was glad to get him in anywhere. He was such a jolly long time making his mind up that I thought he would have been left behind altogether."

"She asked me particularly to keep the carriage for her, and gave me half-a-sovereign to do it, and when I take anything like that, and say I will do some specific service for it, I like to keep my word, or it checks the generosity of the travelling public on future occasions," I replied.

"That is all very well, and I would have kept two carriages for her if you had only told me. It was your fault, Dawkins, for not letting me know."

"Did you see her face as you shut the door?"

"I did. She was as pale as death, and shrank back to the other end of the carriage, as if afraid of the gentleman."

"As if afraid?"

"Yes."

I thought for a few minutes, and it occurred to me that this young lady had some strong and powerful motive in asking for a carriage to herself. She would not have given me the large fee she did, had it not been so. Even the richest and most prodigal do not cast their money about in so reckless a way. Tallmarsh distinctly asserted that she seemed afraid. Now he was what I called a reliable man. I could trust Tallmarsh, for he had a habit of rapid but accurate observation. If she were afraid of something or some one, who was more likely to have inspired that fear than the dilatory stranger? The more I thought the more convinced I became that they were enemies. It even struck me that she might have something to apprehend from him. This idea was intolerable to me. I felt quite interested in the young lady, and exclaimed, with some warmth—

"I should not be at all surprised if that lady is not in some danger."

"Danger!" repeated Tallmarsh; "not at all. Who ever heard of anything of that sort on the South Western?"

"It does not matter what people have heard. Extraordinary things often occur when they are least expected. You admit that, of course. I am more than half inclined to see if all is right in that particular carriage. There was some-

thing in the man's eye which I did not at all like. Its expression was vicious and snake-like."

"Perhaps you are right. What a pity it is that there is no communication between passengers and guard!"

"I shall make one."

"In what way?"

"Oh, simply enough. Where are we now. Let me see—8.55—no tunnels just hereabouts. I shall walk from carriage to carriage until I can take a peep at the one I want, and see what is going on. If I am mistaken there will be no harm done, and if, under heaven, I am of use, why I shall always in future trust my instincts, which to-night tell me that I am wanted."

"You don't mean to say, Dawkins," cried Tallmarsh, in alarm, "that you are going along the train on such a night as this? Think of the speed we are going at. It isn't safe. It's risking your life."

"Oh no, it isn't," I answered confidently; "my nerves are strong enough and my hold firm. I have little to fear. The wind comes from the north-west, I think. Yes. Then I had better get out on the left side."

All Tallmarsh's entreaties and arguments were impotent to prevent me from having a look at the young lady, about whose danger I had a presentiment. The train was going at tremendous speed, but I had confidence in my own powers, knew precisely what there was to be done, and also how to do it. Opening the door carefully, having previously made my cap fast by pulling the band well down under my chin, I placed my feet upon the step, and walked along the narrow iron pathway, holding on to the supports placed in every carriage for that purpose. As well as I remembered, I had some distance to go, for the carriage in which the young lady was, happened to be in the centre of a train of eleven carriages, exclusive of the break van, which was the last of all.

Having reached the end of one carriage, I fancied I should travel better and with less risk if I climbed to the top of the next carriage and progressed over the roof, descending again when I had reached my destination. Accordingly I did so, holding on with the tenacity of a cliff-climber, or a member of the Alpine Club. In about five minutes I arrived at the carriage which I supposed contained the young lady and the passenger with whom I imagined she was unwilling to travel. Placing my ear in close proximity to the top of the lamp, I distinctly heard a man's voice. It was

a strange situation for the guard of a train to be in, with the engine rushing along in all the pride of its irresistible force and speed, but I thought little of appearances and less of consequences. All I cared about was hearing what the man was saying, and this is what he said:—

“I have spoken to you kindly, and if I now speak unkindly it is rather your fault than mine. I need not repeat that I love you more than anything in the whole world, more than life and honour themselves. I wish you to understand that, Agnes, because you will know to what a desperate and reckless state you have brought me. I heard that you had left your friends, and I guessed that you had sought the railway which would convey you to your father; and by so doing, instead of saving yourself, you have given me a glorious opportunity.”

“I have yet to learn, Mr. Bruce,” replied Agnes, whose voice I recognized immediately, “in what your glorious opportunity consists? Although I must in candour confess that personally I dislike you, which is a dislike shared by my father and my friends, I have looked upon you hitherto as a gentleman. You cannot mean——”

“It matters not what I mean,” he interrupted, rudely. “You will know more of me soon. I will, if need be, throw gentility and breeding to the winds; a full hour will elapse before this train stops. It is impossible for you to communicate with or rouse the attention of the guard (“Is it,” thought I); and if you refuse to be my wife there is nothing to prevent me from stabbing you to the heart, and afterwards throwing you out of the window. All traces of the crime would be obliterated. In a foreign land I should find that peace which would be denied me in this, supposing your union with another became a fact. Look at this. It is what they call a Venetian dagger. It is made of glass. See how it sparkles and corruscates in the light of the lamp. All I have to do is to rush at you and plunge its fragile point into your breast, then break off the handle with a snap, and not a drop of blood escapes, nor can any skill remove the broken blade. I bought this dagger on purpose to kill you with, Agnes, if you refused to listen to me. I love you so much, so intensely, so devotedly, that I would a thousand times rather see you dead, than behold you the wife of another.”

“I will never be your wife, Edward,” replied Agnes, in a voice she meant to be strong and firm, but which was, in spite of her, soft and tremulous. “If that reply enrages you, and

makes you forget who you are and what you owe to yourself as a man, to say nothing of your gentle birth, kill me. That is all I can say."

"You would rather die than become my wife?" he said, bitterly. "Is that what you wish me to understand? Why am I so hateful to you, Agnes? Am I repulsive in my appearance or my manner; or am I morally repulsive? I am such as the Almighty made me."

"You allow His name to escape your lips," exclaimed Agnes, "and you can talk in the same breath of committing a breach of one of the Commandments which He gave amidst the thunders of Sinai."

Her lips might well have curled with scorn, for she could not but take him for a hypocrite as well as a coward.

"Once more I ask if you will become my wife?" said the man whom she had called Mr. Bruce. "You know the alternative. Life with me, or—death."

"I cannot."

"And why?"

"Because I love another."

The reply was soft and low, so soft and so low that I had some difficulty in catching it.

"I have always thought so," exclaimed Bruce, in a tone of concentrated bitterness. "It is easy for me to believe what you tell me; but by Heaven you shall never be happy in your love. I will not only blight, but destroy it. This conversation is idle. Will you be my wife, or not, Miss Maitland? Say yes, and I will do all that lies in my power to be of service to you. Say no, and in less than a minute you have not the power to say either one or the other."

I could not help trembling as I heard this dreadful threat. Bruce was desirous of bringing the matter to a distinct issue, and he had done so. Was he a madman, or nothing more than a bad man who had skilfully calculated upon the chance of being able to coerce Miss Maitland, and frighten her into compliance with his wishes. It was clear that she loved another, to whom she was so true that she declared she would prefer death to bestowing her hand upon his rival. I was fearful that she would yield to the influences brought to bear upon her. But I was still more alarmed lest she should reply in the negative, and suffer a cruel death, which she inevitably would, should my hypothesis of his being a madman turn out correct. I listened attentively, and distinctly heard Miss Maitland, after a pause, exclaim,—

"No."

"Very well, you will have brought your fate on yourself," said Mr. Bruce. "I will give you one minute to consider your determination. Think; life is sweet. You are young and beautiful—so fatally beautiful that I wish to Heaven I had never—never seen you. Think—think; recall your determination before your lips are sealed for ever."

I still listened, but there was no response. It appeared to me that Agnes had determined with Spartan heroism to die rather than give him her word that she would marry him; to make a promise under compulsion is generally to retain leave to break it when and where and how you will. Perhaps she did not think so. She was too conscientious, thinking that a promise, however and under whatever circumstances made, was still a sacred obligation. All was clear to me now. She had been staying with friends in town. To avoid the persecution of Mr. Bruce she had left suddenly, intending to go to her home, where she felt sure of obtaining advice and protection.

Whilst I was thinking, I heard the barking of a dog. I concluded that it was the Lady Maud I had seen with Miss Maitland,—the little toy terrier, which was endeavouring to defend its mistress from the dagger of the assassin.

With great rapidity I left the place in which I had been so successful as an eavesdropper, and descending the carriage by the steps at the end, I walked round to the centre compartment; the window was up, and covered with a thick steam, watery and impenetrable, which prevented me from seeing what was going on inside. I heard a shriek, and holding on with one hand, knocked with my knuckles upon the window. The next moment all was still. I then felt in my pocket for the key of the door, using all possible haste, for I was aware that I had been guilty of an imprudence in letting Mr. Bruce know that there was some one without. He could, if he chose, attack me; what chance should I—clinging for my life to the door of the carriage—have in a struggle with him, enjoying as he did the advantage of position and attack? I breathed more freely when I found the key, for I did not wish to die like a dog, and be picked up by my friends mangled and broken limbed, lying in the six-foot way as dead as a stone. Noiselessly I placed the key in the lock, turned it with a sharp click, swung the door back, leaving the key to take care of itself, and sprang, all wet, storm-beaten, and dripping as I was, into the carriage. For a moment the light dazzled me, and I could only see objects imperfectly. I rubbed my eyes with the back of my

hand, and sat down. When my vision came back, I saw, sitting opposite to me, the dark gentleman with the imperturbable air, stroking his moustache with his habitual coolness.

"Look here, my good fellow!" he exclaimed, "as you are, presumably by your attire, an official of the Company, and as I am not acquainted with your Company's rules and regulations, I am willing to admit or to suppose that you have a right to intrude upon my privacy, and that of this young lady's; but you might at least have the civility to shut the door after you, and keep the rain out."

At that moment the train passed through an archway; the door caught against the projecting brickwork, was torn from its hinges, and with a crash was dashed to atoms.

"That accident is entirely owing to your carelessness, and I will take care that you are held responsible for it when we arrive at the next station," continued Mr. Bruce.

I paid no attention to him, but looked at Miss Maitland, who was unconscious of my presence. She had fainted. I was ignorant of any means to restore her to her senses, and thinking the best course I could adopt would be to allow nature to work its own cure, I sat still and pitied her in my heart. Suddenly it struck me that instead of being in a fainting fit, she might be dead. Acting upon this suggestion, I took her hand in mine and eagerly scanned her apparel to detect the least trace of blood; but I could find none. The Venetian dagger, the threats of Mr. Bruce, his persistence in them all flashed across and crowded into my memory. Had the dagger been broken off as he said it should be? Fortunately she soon relieved me from this horrible suspicion, by opening her eyes and uttering a prolonged sigh.

"I am a friend of that young lady's, and can attend to her," said Mr. Bruce. "Perhaps you will be good enough to explain the object of this species of domiciliary visit, and relieve us of your presence."

"I will comply with the former part of your request with pleasure, though compliance with the latter part will be at my discretion," I replied. "I am here to protect this young lady from your violence and probable ill-treatment; which, if there is a word of truth in what you have just said, is likely to result in murder."

"Ah, what do you mean?" he asked, stammeringly, for the moment losing his self-possession and looking very pale and frightened.

This change in his manner convinced me that he had not

really intended to kill Miss Maitland, but that he was a designing scoundrel, who fancied he could so play upon the girl's fears as to induce her to marry him. The Venetian dagger had been purchased with this end in view, and was intended to act, as it did, an important part in the real-life drama.

"I mean precisely what I say," was my reply; "I have overheard your conversation with this lady, and I shall consider it my duty to hand you over to the police as soon as we arrive at Winchester."

"What have you overheard? and in what way have——"

"That does not matter in the least," I said; "it is enough for you that I know it; so you may give whatever explanation you have to give, to the magistrate before whom you will be brought without delay."

Miss Maitland opened her eyes again and looked at me; and, as she recognized me, a feeling of inexpressible relief pervaded her features. "You have come, you have come! Thank God you have come!" she said.

"In time to be of service to you, I am happy to say," I replied. "Do not be alarmed at the broken door; that was an unavoidable accident. Your life is safe, and will be, as I shall stay until our arrival at the station. I have heard this gentleman's threats, and it will be a pleasant task to me to give him into custody."

"That is out of your power," exclaimed Mr. Bruce, superciliously. "You may be, and doubtless are, in your own opinion, a very clever fellow; but permit me to inform you that unless this lady chooses to make a complaint against me for a real or fancied wrong, you have no jurisdiction in the matter whatever."

"What is your pleasure, Miss?" I asked, admitting tacitly the truth of what he advanced.

"In what way?"

"Shall I, or shall I not, have this gentleman arrested on a charge——"

"No, no," she said hurriedly, "it is all over now. I can have no scandal—no exposure. You shall be rewarded; for I scarcely know what I owe you—my life, perhaps. Let that gentleman's conscience be his punisher; I wish him to be unmolested by the law."

"But——"

"Take that," exclaimed Mr. Bruce, placing a ten-pound note in my hand; "that will be of more advantage to you than a dozen arrests. Look upon the whole affair as a joke; and for-

get it at your earliest convenience. This young lady gets out at Winchester; I go on to Southampton. There is an end of everything, as far as you are concerned."

"Yes, let it be so," Miss Maitland chimed in.

Thus constrained, I had no option but to comply with their united wishes, though it was with much reluctance that I did so. I was, however, well satisfied with being instrumental in saving Miss Maitland from annoyance, and extricating her from a serious dilemma. She inquired my name, and on alighting at Winchester station, she held herself answerable for the breakage of the door. Mr. Bruce changed carriages; but I remarked that he continued his journey. Some time afterwards I received a letter containing a cheque for twenty pounds, drawn by Richard Maitland, whom I imagined to be her father. After this the adventure faded from my mind, and I ceased to think of it until I saw the notice of a marriage in a weekly paper. It ran as follows: "On the 4th of June, 1854, James David Tredegar, eldest son of the late Llewellyn Tredegar, Esq., of Tan-y-braig, North Wales, to Agnes, only daughter of Richard Maitland, Esq., of Cedar Hall, Hants." So it was evident that Mr. Bruce had not succeeded in marrying the girl whom he had so grossly persecuted, when travelling in a first-class carriage of the South Coast Express.

II.—THE LEAMINGTON LADY.

"SILENCE, if *you* please, gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Tench, the amiable landlord of the Royal Mail, with that gravity peculiar to him when all the pensioners of the South Western, and all that part of England, Railway were assembled together in his hospitable parlour.

Instantly was there a dead silence, and all eyes were turned in the direction of Mr. Cyrus Read, who had been an engine-driver, for it was pretty generally known that he was to tell the next story. A quiet and placid-looking old gentleman was Cyrus Read, with a great wealth of silvery hair. His countenance seemed to tell those who looked at it, that he was at peace with all mankind: he had nearly run his race, and he wished to fade away into the darkness of the night which gives

place to the dawn of eternal day, without giving offence to the meanest of God's creatures.

The most inoffensive man that ever lived was Cyrus Read; but he had done some good work in his time. Many thousands of people had been guided safely to their destination by him. Had he been a drunkard, or careless, had his hand faltered, or his eye failed to see a warning signal, much desolation would have travelled to many a home; and that despair which brings forth the undying worm, would have settled upon many a heart. The public were indebted to him; but that hydra-headed monster always treats with ignomy and neglect those people who serve it best.

Read produced a piece of dirty crumpled paper from his waistcoat-pocket, and spread it out on the table before him. The table in question was not altogether innocent of beer-stains, so that the legibility of the writing on the paper was not increased. This scrap contained the worthy man's notes; and it was by the aid of a pair of spectacles that he hoped to be able to read them. With a preliminary hem, and a sip of some gin-and-water to lubricate the words and make them flow smoothly, he cast a benignant glance around him, and began the story of the Leamington Lady:—

“Before I came on to the South Western I was working for the London and Nor' Western, whose trains run to Coventry, Rugby, and other places in the Midland Counties. In those days I was a porter. I had'nt taken to engine driving, and I was employed at the Leamington Station. As it is only a branch line to Leamington there is no through traffic, and consequently the work is not heavy. I had plenty of time to look about me, and I derived some gratification from watching the passengers. My father was in the detective police, and my mother was a matron in a house of correction; so I perhaps derived a habit of curiosity from my earliest childhood, and my mother's milk. I lodged at a public house called the ‘Spoon and Punchbowl,’ an indifferent hostelry which was cheap, and also nasty; but as people with limited incomes must not be too particular, I studied my eighteen shillings a week as well as my convenience, and endeavoured to believe that a contented mind was a perpetual feast. It may be so; the copy-books used to tell us so; but though I didn't grumble, I never objected to a bit of boiled bacon, or a crust of bread and cheese.

“Opposite the Spoon and Punchbowl was a house which the proprietor had some difficulty in letting. There was a

rumour abroad that it was haunted. I never believed the rumour myself, because I don't believe in ghosts; but if I didn't, other people did, and the house wouldn't let. One evening when I was taking a pipe from the bar in order to fill it with tobacco, preparatory to having a smoke, some one came in and said, as people will say, 'What's the news?'

"Nothing whatever, that I'm aware of, I replied; 'though, now I come to think of it, the guard of 5.15 did tell me something about a murder at Coventry. I don't know that there's any other news, except that the cat downstairs has had kittens, and the mother is doing as well as can be expected.'

"Well, that's news, certainly,' he replied, with a laugh; 'perhaps I can give you some news.'

"Perhaps you can,' I answered; for, being a peaceable man, I never contradict anybody.

"The haunted house is let, over the way.'

"Let, is it? Well, I don't suppose the incoming tenant has got a lease of it.'

"Taken it for a year.'

"Indeed,' I said; 'hope they may like it.'

"It isn't 'they'' replied my friend.

"Who, then?'

"A lady; I've not seen her, but my friend who is at the house-agents', told me she was very beautiful, and that her name was Broadcastle.'

"What!' I exclaimed; 'is the lady going to live in the haunted house all by herself?'

"It seems so. We shall soon know, for she takes possession to-morrow.'

"After hearing this, the house assumed a fresh interest in my eyes. I felt sorry for the lady, who was going to live there all by herself, and imagined that she had been deceived by the specious misrepresentations of a designing house-agent.

"The next day I was at work at the station, and engaged in packing away some goods, placing them ready for the carriers' carts, when I saw the name of Broadcastle on a large box. This set me thinking again. She had sent her luggage on before her, and I concluded she would shortly arrive, as indeed she did. The next train brought with it several passengers, amongst whom was a tall dark woman with very regular features. The expression of her face was stern and implacable. I imagined her to be a woman of strong passions, and that she could be a good hater should occasion arise. The symmetry of her form was perfect, and when she looked at you from

under her long eye-lashes, the same sort of feeling as that which the fixed gaze of a snake begets, took possession of you. I cannot say that I was much prepossessed in the lady's favour, but I did not dislike her appearance. Before she spoke to me, I, by some strange kind of divination, guessed that she was the person who had taken the haunted house. She brought no servants with her, and had only the one box I have mentioned, besides a carpet-bag and several rugs, papers, books, etc. She spoke to me about the box, and told me to take it to Myrtle Villa, which was the name of the haunted house. She said she was going to the agents to announce her arrival, and that they would send a servant, who would open the door and take the box from me. I agreed, and in answer to her inquiries I told her that the best hotel in the town was the Royal. I believe she stayed there that night, taking possession of the haunted house the next day. The agents had some difficulty in procuring a servant for the lady. Many who wanted places badly, knew the character of the house, and would not have lived in it for worlds. So general was the dread and detestation in which it was held, that only an old woman could be induced to accept the post of servant of all work. This old woman I knew; her name was Heath, and so long as she could get a certain quantity of gin a day, she did not care for anything. If ghosts were in the habit of retailing spirits she would have been hand and glove with them. To everyone's surprise no complaints were made about the house, and Mrs. Heath declared that her mistress was quiet and contented. The lady was not much at home in the day-time; she travelled about, taking a ticket sometimes for Kenilworth, but generally for Rugby. After two months had elapsed she was so well known on the line that everyone called her the Leamington lady. She seemed to have plenty of money, and she was liberal enough, though not extravagant with it.

"The summer passed away, and the bleak winter succeeded. The wind howled round the old house, and made it look still more miserable and gloomy than it was by nature. One day when the snow was on the ground and the biting blast was freezing all within its influence, Mrs. Broadcastle came home from Rugby by the last train. It was very dark, and the roads, owing to the snow and frost, were uncommonly slippery.

"'Are you going home, Read?' she said to me, knowing me well by name.

"'Not yet, ma'am,' I replied; 'I haven't knocked off work, and shan't for ten minutes to come.'

"'Oh! I thought you might be. That is the last train, I believe?'

"'That is the last, ma'am. If you want me to do anything for you, and will wait a little while, I shall be glad to do it.'

"'Thank you. I should be much obliged if you would hold your lantern before me as I go home. I am so terribly afraid of falling. Indeed, I did fall to-day in Rugby, and hurt my head.'

"I looked up, and saw that her left eye was contused and a little black, but it seemed to me to be an injury arising more from a blow than a fall.

"'If you will step into the waiting room, ma'am,' I said, 'and wait by the fire until I have done, I will show you a light.'

"'Thank you,' she replied, walking into the waiting-room; and taking a chair near the fire which was fast burning out, she sat down.

"I followed her, poked the fire up a little, and bustled about my work, which was soon finished. When I returned to the waiting-room I found that she was in tears. She did not hear me enter. Her tears fell fast, nor did she attempt to check them. Her veil was up, and her face had as sad an expression as that of a Magdalen at the foot of the Cross.

"'Oh God!' I heard her exclaim; 'why, why has this heavy affliction fallen upon me? Why has the curse of my sex grasped me with a force and an energy I cannot resist?'

"I made a fumbling noise with my feet upon the floor to rouse her attention. She started, wiped her eyes with a handkerchief, and said, 'You have not been long.'

"'No, ma'am,' I replied; 'didn't like to keep you waiting.'

"I held up the lantern, and we left the station. Myrtle Villa was about ten minutes' walk from the station. The roads were very slippery and dangerous. The wind blew keenly from the east, and penetrated to the marrow in one's bones, so searching and penetrating was it.

"'If I may make so bold, ma'am,' I said, 'I will offer you my arm. You may find it an agreeable support.'

"'Thank you,' she said; 'I shall be much obliged.'

"I offered my arm, and felt her small, elegant, and well-gloved fingers descend upon my stiff jacket; and, to tell you the truth, I was rather proud of having a real lady hanging on my arm. It was a sort of thing I was not accustomed to, and it flattered my vanity.

“‘Do they not say the house I live in is haunted, porter?’ she inquired.

“‘Yes, ma’am. Such is the general report. The house stood empty I don’t know how long before you took it, and the agents offered it to parties for nothing, just because they wanted to get some one to live in it.’

“‘Why do they say it is haunted?’

“‘Well, ma’am, the story goes, that a lady lived there all alone, just as you may be living now.’

“‘Yes.’

“‘And she had a little baby, but her husband never came to see her or the child. One day the people heard cries in the house, and when they went in, the baby was lying on the floor with its throat cut.’

“‘Is that true?’ asked Mrs. Broadcastle, fixing her full, keen eyes upon me.

“‘As true as Gospel, ma’am.’

“‘And what became of the lady?’

“‘She got off. No one knows where she went or what became of her. The affair gave the house a bad name, which it cannot shake off, and I believe, as long as Leamington’s a town, it will never be so well liked as it used to be.’

“‘A very entertaining if slightly horrible story,’ she said, with a laugh.

“‘A strange, wild, weird laugh it was—one that curdled my blood, and made me feel cold and chill.

“‘I remembered that laugh afterwards, and *then* I did not wonder that there was something remarkable about it.

“‘Do you think the shade of the murdered baby haunts the house?’ she added.

“‘That is what the people say, though whether it is so or not, ma’am, I cannot tell. You should be the best judge of that, seeing that you live in the house.’

“‘She made no reply, and we presently arrived at the house. The old woman Lizzie Heath let her mistress in, and I received a shilling for my pains.

“‘Will you come in and have something to drink, this cold night, porter?’ the lady exclaimed.

“‘Thank you kindly, ma’am,’ I answered, ‘there is a public-house close handy. I have been well paid already for doing nothing, and I do not like to impose upon good nature.’

“‘No more I did. Still, that was not my only reason for refusing to go into the house. I always stood in dread of it. No man placed greater credence in the rumour of its being

haunted than I did. Bless my soul! when I come to think of it, there was something ghostly about the very look of it. I fancy I see it now. An effort of memory suffices to bring it, like a picture, before my mind's eye. It was a two-storied house, not given to much display in the window line. It existed in the days of the window-tax, and some of the windows had been closed up, so that nothing but ill-looking blinds remained. There was one tree on the left-hand side of the door—a solemn stately-looking elm, having a funereal appearance about its foliage. I often used to stand on the other side of the street and look at the branches of that elm tree, fancying they were like so many plumes on a hearse as they nodded in the wind. Although I saw that Mrs. Broadcastle was a lady, there was something about her which repelled me. She could not have been thoroughly good, I argued, or she would not have taken up her abode in so dark and lonely a place as Myrtle Villa. For years, its evil reputation had been enough to deter many respectable people from entering it. Why should she be more brave than the rest of the world. Because it suited her, I supposed. Decent houses would not have her, and she was glad to find rest for the sole of her foot, even in a haunted house.

“With a shudder I turned my back upon Myrtle Villa, and walked over the way, where I solaced myself with a glass of something hot, and as strong as it was hot, for the weather was mortal cold, and I wanted something to keep the frost out of my stomach.

“Time slipped away, and, as well as I can remember, six weeks may have passed, before I again came prominently in contact with Mrs. Broadcastle. I met Lizzie Heath one morning outside the Punchbowl, and said, in a casual sort of way, ‘Good day to you, Goody.’

“‘Good day, Mr. Read, and how may you be?’ she replied.

“‘Thank you, I’m very well, and hope you’re the same. Anything stirring over the way?’

“‘Why, yes. We’re a little busier than usual.’

“‘Oh, indeed! and what may be the reason of that,’ I inquired, wondering what could have disturbed the serenity of so quiet a household.

“‘It was only last night,’ said Lizzie Heath, ‘and rather unexpected. I must tell you.’

“‘What?’

“‘Why, you know. I’ve been all over the town for a nurse, and much trouble I’ve had, too. If it had not been for Dr.

Jeafferson's kindness I don't know what we should have done. He recommended a nurse at Coventry, and she came by the train this morning. Nurses are scarce in Leamington now, for I really do think all the ladies are of the same mind at one time.'

" 'Do you mean to tell me that?' I began; but I couldn't go on, so surprised was I at what I guessed Lizzie Heath had to communicate.

" 'A little boy, Mr. Read, and as fine a one as ever I saw in my life.'

" 'Is it, really?'

" 'That it is; but she's very bad.'

" 'I'm sorry to hear that,' I replied; 'may I ask if the infant is like its father?'

" 'There now, Mr. Read, you're joking,' returned Lizzie.

" 'Joking! how's that?'

" 'Why it ain't got no father. Leastways it don't know him.'

" 'Ah! that's a different thing. Well, good-bye, Lizzie. I suppose it's no good asking you to have anything?'

" 'No, I'm obliged to you. There's always plenty at home, and nothing locked up.'

"So the mystery was solved at last. Mrs. Broadcastle was a mother. She could call a blooming boy her offspring, and she had come to Leamington in order to escape observation, and in the haunted house she found the quiet and seclusion she was in search of. Whatever her error might have been, I felt sorry for her. I could picture to myself the many miserable days and sleepless nights which had been her portion, and if there were ghosts in Myrtle Villa she must have made acquaintance with them many a time and oft. Poor lady! Perhaps hers was the old story—a confiding heart and a base betrayer.

"The accounts which I received from time to time from old Lizzie Heath were satisfactory. Mother and child were doing well, and I was glad to hear it. The weather still continued chilly and frosty. Snow fell at intervals, and we experienced such weather as may be expected during the early months of the year. It happened, singularly enough, one afternoon, that I was thinking of Mrs. Broadcastle, when a train came in and a gentleman alighted. Instead of taking a fly he stayed on the platform and spoke to me. He was tall, dark, and commanding; he had the air of a military man, or of one who had, during some period of his life, served in the army. He was remarkably well dressed, and wore expensive jewelry.

“‘Look here, my good fellow!’ he said to me; ‘I suppose you know pretty nearly all the people in this place?’

“‘Yes sir,’ I replied; ‘I have been here some time, and I know a good many.’

“‘Are you acquainted with Mrs. Broadcastle?—that is to say, do you know where she lives?’

“‘Oh yes, sir, I know her.’

“‘What do you mean by replying in that way?’ he cried, in a harsh voice.

“‘Everybody knows Mrs. Broadcastle, sir, because she lives in the haunted house. If you wish to go there I will, in a few minutes, conduct you.’

“‘Thank you; I accept your offer,’ he said, stroking his moustache.

“By the time we reached Myrtle Villa it was growing dark. Daylight faded away at five o’clock or a little after, and lights were burning in the windows of the haunted house, in which the lady had killed the baby. The gentleman was admitted by Lizzie Heath, and, after inquiring at what time the last train left for Rugby, he gave me a slight gratuity. Actuated by some strange motives of curiosity, I walked up and down the street, absorbed in meditation. Possibly the gentleman was the husband of Mrs. Broadcastle; or, at all events, the father of the child. After the lapse of about half an hour, I heard loud voices in the house, and an altercation was evidently taking place. Pausing outside the window, I heard the lady say, ‘For pity’s sake do not do that. Surely you ought to be satisfied with what you have done. Have I not suffered enough at your hands? Must I undergo more misery and more shame?’

“‘I have decided, and nothing you can say will move me in the least,’ replied a deep bass voice, which I recognized in an instant.

“‘But think how ill I am. Wait a little; let me get stronger?’ pleaded Mrs. Broadcastle, in a sad and plaintive voice.

“‘I tell you it is useless to talk to me. Whatever has happened to you is not so much my fault as your own. The boy must come with me. He shall be well taken care of, and you will thank me afterwards for removing a burden which would prevent you from going back to your friends, and resuming your old place in society. The time is slipping away. I go by the next train. Try and persuade yourself that I am your friend, and have your interests at heart.’

"Mrs. Broadcastle's only reply to this speech was to sob violently. As I was standing close under the window, I could distinctly hear all that passed. It seemed to me that the gentleman was asserting his right to the child, and that he intended to take it away with him.

The door was soon opened, and the gentleman came out, holding in his arms a small burden. Whether it was fancy or not, I cannot tell, but I thought I heard a tiny wail steal from beneath the shawl. To escape observation, I shrank into the shadow, and then crossing over the way, I hastened to the station, where I arrived before the passenger. The train was alongside the platform when I came up, and the engine was getting up steam. I had to attend to the points, so as to let the train go on a particular line of rails. In order to do this I had to walk a few hundred yards up the line, which I did leisurely, swinging my arms to and fro, to keep myself warm. The point at which I stood was near a level crossing, and I always warned people, when I saw them, not to pass over until the train had gone by, as shocking accidents sometimes happen to nervous and careless persons. The moon had risen in the heavens, and her appearance, together with the bright luminous look of the stars, denoted every likelihood of a frosty night.

"I had not been half a minute at my post, before I saw somebody coming along the pathway leading to the level crossing.

"'Take care,' I said; 'there is a train coming!'

"It was a woman. She took no notice whatever of my warning, but opened the gate and stood near the line, looking towards the station, from whence the hiss of the steam was distinctly audible, and the red light exhibited by the engine glimmered and glistened like a fixed and distant star. To my intense astonishment, a vagrant moonbeam falling on this lady's face, revealed the features of Mrs. Broadcastle.

"She knows her child is going by this train, I thought, and she has come down here to take a last fond look, as it is borne past her on the wings of the wind. She did not appear to notice me, though I stared rudely enough at her. Do what I could, I was unable to take my eyes off her. Her face was ghastly pale, so pale indeed that I involuntarily thought of the corpse of a dear sister, whom I saw lying dead before her coffin was nailed down. There was a whistle, and I knew that the train was off. She heard it too, for she started and walked boldly on to the line before the six foot way. I was holding the handle of the 'swish,' with all my strength, in order to shunt the train on to the right line of rails, so that I

was utterly unable to loose my hold and go up to her ; had I done so, the train would have gone on the down line, and a collision would have been the inevitable result. All I could do was to cry out and warn her a second time. So I exclaimed, loudly, 'Take care, ma'am—the train is coming!'

"She made no answer. The engine was gliding along the rails, and that terrible red light came nearer and nearer.

"'For God's sake, ma'am,' I exclaimed, 'be careful: you will be run down else.'

"Her only reply to this appeal was a stifled sob. She took one long penetrating glance at the on-coming engine, and then fell on her knees. I thought she was about to pray ; but no, she bared her neck, taking from it a handkerchief and collar, which she cast from her ; then she laid her head upon the hard metal over which the train would in a few seconds have to pass. Oh ! the awful agony of that moment. Oh ! the soul-deadening horror I experienced. I felt faint and sick, and ill and dizzy, for I saw it all then. She was weary of her life, and was about to commit suicide. There could be no two opinions about the matter ; a choking sensation rose in my throat, and the hot blood rushed to my face, making my eyes burn. I longed to save her from herself. I had a mind to let the point go, and drag her from her doom ; but had I done so, I should have endangered many lives, and should have ruined my own prospects in life. I shouted and signalled to the engine-driver, but without making him comprehend that there was anything wrong, until he was within two or three yards of the unhappy lady. Then he reversed his engine and did all he could to avert the catastrophe, for he, too, saw the motionless body lying in the roadway. But it was too late, the wheels of the engine passed over her neck, severing flesh and bone and cartilage ; completely decapitating her. But why dwell upon such a nameless horror ; why linger over so shocking a scene ? For many and many a year I could not succeed in getting it out of my mind. I was haunted by it. When the train was at a stand-still, I relinquished my hold of the points, and ran along to the engine. The driver and stoker had alighted, and were bending over the dead body of Mrs. Broadcastle.

"'A bad business, this, Read ?' said the driver, a man of the name of Harris. He's dead now, poor fellow ! I saw him die. But that's neither here nor there.

"The head had rolled a little way from the body, and was lying between the two lines of rails. I stooped down, and picking it up, I held it by the hair and rushed towards the

train. The features were not convulsed, as might have been expected: there was a calm, hopeful expression upon them, which was a little marred by a few splashes of blood.

“‘What are you going to do?’ asked Harris, observing, as he afterwards said, that I looked rather wild and scared.

“‘You’ll see,’ I replied, running along the line and looking in at each first-class carriage. At last I saw a head; it was quite enough for me. I knew who it was in a moment.

“‘What’s the matter, porter; and why are we stopping here?’ said the gentleman who had called at Myrtle Villa, and taken Mrs. Broadcastle’s child away from her.

“He was leaning half out of the window, and smoking a cigar in an indifferent manner.

“‘That’s what’s the matter,’ I said, suddenly holding up the severed head, from which the blood still dripped in sullen splashes.

“‘What!’ he exclaimed; ‘great God! what is this?’

“The cigar fell from his mouth, as his gaze settled upon the grim relic of her whom he had used so cruelly. I held it up to him with fiendish malignity, for I derived a peculiar satisfaction from torturing him. In my opinion, he was the author of the calamity, and who could have any sympathy with, or compassion for such a hard-hearted wretch? Had I not heard the poor lady plead, in heart-broken accents, for her child, which he had refused to give her? It was the more cruel because she had been a mother so short a time.

“After staring at the head for a minute or so, he became livid, drew his breath shortly, and fell back in the carriage as if he had been shot. Taking the head back to the body, I laid it reverently beside it, and felt some satisfaction in thinking that her self-immolation was avenged in some small degree.

“The sickening remains were taken to the station, and the train proceeded on its journey. The gentleman went on to Rugby; and I afterwards ascertained that he was possessed of large property. It was of little use to him, however, after the horrible occurrence of that awful night, for he lost his senses, and became a drivelling idiot, placed under the care of a keeper. Nearly every day they told me he had a spasmodic fit of horror; he would place his hands before his eyes, and cry ‘Away, away! It is too dreadful. Oh! put out this fire—give me water, water, water. That face again! Oh, God! I killed her.’

“Mrs. Broadcastle was followed to the grave by her friends who were discovered by the police. The mystery surrounding

the Leamington Lady was then solved. She was a Staffordshire lady, and had been promised marriage by Mr. Broadcastle, the gentleman from Rugby ; but he had basely deceived her, and subsequently ill-treated her. She fled from him and took up her abode in Leamington, to be away from all who knew her. The frequent journeys by rail were made on purpose to see Mr. Broadcastle, and try to induce his hard heart to relent,—but in vain.

“For years I was in the habit of going to the cemetery on Sundays, and putting a few wild flowers on the grave ; and though it is long since what I have narrated took place, I often think with an inward tremor, of the **LEAMINGTON LADY.**”

III.—A STRANGE PASSENGER.

WHEN the pensioners next met together, some of them, by the long-drawn expression of their countenances, did not appear to have forgotten the story of the Leamington Lady, and they experienced a feeling of relief when their worthy chairman exclaimed, “Gentlemen, I think I shall meet with your united approbation, if I call upon our esteemed friend and fellow-pensioner, Mr. James Boxall. He intimated to me this morning that he had a story to tell, and would do his best to tell it in a manner which would enlist your sympathies and ensure your gratification.”

Boxall found himself, as he might have expected, the cynosure of all eyes, and his voice was slightly tremulous as he began, with an apology for any faults he might make in the narration of his tale, modest timidity being one of Jem Boxall’s most marked characteristics.

A STRANGE PASSENGER.

ABOUT twenty years have elapsed since I was a guard going short distances on the L. & N. W. I was at Manchester, that being my head-quarters. I lived near the London Road Station, so as to be handy to my work. The house in which I had lodgings was an old-fashioned red brick dwelling, with an antediluvian look about it, which did not impress any one favourably, except a lover of the antique. The people with whom I

lodged were dealers in works of art, and every room in the house was inconveniently filled with pictures, pieces of china, sculptures, and all those things which go to form the stock-in-trade of a miscellaneous dealer. In the bed-room I occupied, were suits of chain-armour, breast-plates, picture frames, prints, and pictures themselves hanging from the wall. One picture on the mantel-piece particularly arrested my attention. It was a representation of a gentleman who, from his dress, had lived in the days of the Stuarts. He was great in white ruffles and velvet of the richest Genoa kind. He wore a little peaked beard, his hair was long and dark, and his moustache was carefully cut. A strangely sad expression had this countenance, and it used to worry me when I went to bed. After I had put the candle out, I fancied he was peering at me through the darkness, and I had a strong inclination to turn the picture round and place him with his face to the wall. I verily believe I should have done so if I had not been animated with a fear that he might become indignant, and step down from his canvas, drawing that ugly-looking little sword which hung by his side.

The people who kept the house were a Mr. and Mrs. Woskin. The latter was a woman of about forty or five and forty years of age, in an excellent state of preservation, being, in fact, one of those women who never get positively old, and go off like the snuff of a candle at sixty odd. An excellent hand at making a bargain was Mrs. Woskin, which was fortunate, for her husband was a man of weak intellect. He was not sufficiently mad to be locked up, but he was decidedly insane enough to cause Mrs. Woskin an infinitude of trouble. I found him very harmless, though I have no doubt some of you will praise me for being courageous enough to live in a house presided over by a mad landlord. He was very mild and quiet with me. I listened to his nonsense and humoured him, as was fitting in such a case; but he returned my kindness with base ingratitude, for he never lost an opportunity of drinking any liquor I might have placed away in my room for my own private use. His poor wife had to keep a vigilant watch upon his movements, for he was so addicted to the consumption of spirituous liquors, that he would take a picture or a medallion, a bust or a piece of china, and sell it to the first comer for a tenth part of its value. He had been known to sell his boots in the street for a penny each, and after having purchased a pint of beer with the twopence, he would come home and say he had lost them. His special antipathy was the servant. No

matter what sort of a servant Mrs. Woskin engaged, whether good, bad, or indifferent, he at once imbibed the strongest aversion to her, and did not take any pains to disguise his dislike. He would take me into his confidence, and make me the recipient of his complaints. During my stay at the curiosity shop, the servant was a tall, good-natured, willing girl, who did her work well, and never grumbled; but Mr. Woskin promised me all the property he possessed if I would only get her out of the house. I said I would do my best, and he declared that he would go to Liverpool the next day and sell a picture, to enable him to give me some money. Of course his conversation and his promise were both forgotten as soon as made; but the next morning, as I was about to start with the 7.15 train for Liverpool, he made his appearance upon the platform, with a small picture under his arm. It represented a family group in a farm-house, and I remembered his having told me that it was a copy of some celebrated piece of Teniers.

"Good morning," he said; "is this the train for Liverpool?"

"Yes, this is it," I replied.

"When does it start?"

"In about five minutes."

"Very good. I am going by it."

"You!" I said, in surprise, thinking that if his wife knew of his intention he would find it rather difficult to carry it out.

"Have you forgotten what I said to you last night?" he replied, solemnly; "only get that girl out of the house, and anything I have in the world is yours. I don't want any rent from you. You are in my house for life if you like, but only get rid of that girl for me, and then we shall all be happy."

"Yes, yes," I answered, soothingly; "I told you last night that I would. You may trust me."

"Have you got your ticket?" I asked.

"Oh, yes."

"Second class?"

"No, sir," he said, with some asperity; "I always travel first, if I have to sell my hat to do it."

I took a glance at the article of wearing apparel in question which he was wearing at the time, and I was not much impressed in its favour, nor did I think that its monetary value exceeded a sixpence, at the outside.

I held him in conversation for some time, hoping that he

might forget the object with which he visited the station; but no, he was tenacious of his purpose, and there was nothing for me to do but to put him into a carriage. There happened to be one carriage in the train which had a bad name, as far as the centre compartment was concerned. I never could get any one to travel far in it. If I put a party in at the starting place, they generally made a point of getting out at the next station, complaining loudly of strange noises and the existence of what one gentleman called an "invisible presence." Now this seemed to me a capital phrase. I was never able to see anything in the carriage, though I had been conscious of peculiar noises. Be that as it may, the carriage, numbered 368.6, acquired a bad name, and all regular passengers avoided it scrupulously. I explained the matter to the station-master, and he forwarded a report to the board of directors, asking permission to take the carriage off the line, but this proposal to reduce the value of the Company's rolling stock did not meet with a hearty response; on the contrary, the secretary wrote back to say that he would not listen to such ridiculous nonsense, and that he was surprised that so clever a man as the Manchester Station Master was known to be, should lend belief to such an absurdity. But the station master knew that it was not all absurdity. He had travelled in that carriage, and had been frightened out of his seven senses. Mr. Woskin, dealer in works of art, etc., hadn't the full complement of senses in his possession, so I argued that if he came under the influence of the "invisible presence," it could not do him much harm. I resolved to look after him at every station, to see that he came to no harm, and with a slightly mischievous feeling I opened the door of the centre compartment of carriage 368.6, and saw Mr. Woskin enter.

Having shut the door and locked it, I walked the length of the train to look to the other passengers, and see what the porters were about; and I did not return to carriage 368.6 until the train was on the point of starting. Mr. Woskin had his head out of the window, and was beckoning to me with frantic eagerness.

"What's the matter, now?" I asked, knowing what the answer would be, for I had seen many people agitated in a similar manner.

"There's some one in the carriage."

"Of course there is; are not you there?"

"I don't mean that, Boxall," he said; "I mean some 'thing.' But it's invisible, and I can't see it."

"If you can't see it, how do you know it's there?" I asked, with a laugh.

"Because I can hear it."

"Hear what?"

"Its breathing, and I thought it said something."

"You must be dreaming. Go on to the next station; and if you still fancy that there is something in the carriage with you, why you can change."

"Let me do it now. Let me get out!" he cried, piteously.

"There isn't time now; the train's starting."

As I spoke I raised my whistle to my lips and blew it. The engine creaked and puffed, and away we went. As I sprang into my van I saw Woskin's head still out of the carriage; and I am free to confess he looked the picture of misery. He felt sorry that he had projected a journey to Liverpool; and I have no doubt that he would have freely pardoned the long-limbed Mary, who certainly was chiefly made up of legs and wings, if he could only have been liberated from the thralldom of that hateful carriage, and the depressing influence of the invisible presence.

We had not gone more than ten miles before an accident happened to the engine, which might have been attended with very disastrous results. It was a narrow-gauge engine, and the crank working on the off-side driving-axle, snapped in two, thereby endangering the safety of the train. The driver at once perceived what had happened, and worked the near-side engine and crank until we came to a standstill, whistling meanwhile for me to put on the breaks, which I did, without a moment's delay. We were not above a mile from a station; and after consulting with the driver, we decided that he had better run on at a very slow pace, so as to avoid any catastrophe, should the engine run off the line, which was what we were afraid of. The accident was untimely, but it might have been much worse; and when its nature was made known to the passengers, they one and all congratulated themselves upon having escaped very well.

I did not think it worth while to get into my break van again, so I hung on by the side of the carriage in which Mr. Woskin was, wondering much why I had not seen him. I began to fear that he had frightened himself into a fit. I blamed myself for leaving him alone. When I looked in at the carriage window, I saw the opposite door open, and a gentleman got out. I am positive that I saw some one get out; Woskin was sitting in a corner; his hands were folded before

him, as if he were saying his prayers, and he leaned back with his eyes shut. I drew my key from my pocket, and opening the door, I entered the carriage, and gave Woskin a shake; but he did not move—he had fainted. The opposite door was open; the train had just begun to move at a snail's pace, and I dashed through the compartment. The individual I had seen emerge from the carriage, was walking quickly across a field. Anxious to see who he was, and feeling that I had a right to demand his ticket, I rushed after him, clearing the fence at the side of the line at a bound. Hearing footsteps behind him, the strange man turned round, and fixed his dull, cold, colourless eyes upon me. I stood rooted to the ground with astonishment and surprise; for the *fac-simile* of the picture which hung over the mantel-piece in my bedroom, at the old curiosity shop, was standing before me. There was the sad but handsome and aristocratic face, the long black hair, the velvet cloak, the peaked beard, and carefully cut moustache. Could I believe the evidence of my senses; I rather doubted whether I could; but summoning all my resolution to my aid, I darted after him. He had neared a hedge, and when I again pursued my way, he passed through a gap. I did not lose an instant in following him; I went through the gap, and looked about me: he was gone, he had vanished, or been spirited away, and was nowhere to be seen. I hunted about everywhere, but without success; my efforts were unavailing. The stranger had disappeared. Not having any time to lose, for the train was gradually getting out of sight, I gave up the search as hopeless, and with a shiver of horror and dread, and a "Get you behind me, Satan!" I ran back after the train, and overtook it before any nervous passenger had taken it into his head to call out for the guard. Entering carriage 368.6, I found Woskin a little better; he knew where he was, and was overjoyed to see me, but there was a very haggard expression about his face: he appeared to have suffered acutely during the brief space which had elapsed since we left Manchester.

"Is—he is he gone?" asked Woskin, nervously.

"Is who gone?" I replied, feigning ignorance of his meaning.

"Why, the dark man: he was sitting here before the train stopped."

"There is no one here now; you must have been dreaming?"

"No—not I," he exclaimed, nervously, as his teeth chattered.

"Oh! it was awful to sit near him. He was like an iceberg, and froze the blood in my veins."

"Where did he get in? I'll swear the carriage contained

nobody when we started, except yourself. Did he come in at the roof, or fly in at the window, like one of Peter Wilkins's flying men and women?"

"He got in at Manchester, just after the train left the station; he opened the door on the off-side, with a key, in a noiseless manner, and I did not see him at first. Oh! it is awful to think of it. When he looked at me I thought I should have dropped into the ground. I would much rather be ground to powder under the wheels of the engine, than I would sit by that man, and travel alone with him again."

"It is very strange," I remarked, not knowing what to think.

"He wouldn't speak. I was glad of that," continued Woskin; "but he kept on looking at me with those gimlet-like eyes of his, which pierced through and through me. I wouldn't undergo it again—no, not for the universe, or a myriad of sovereigns."

"What about the noises?" I inquired.

"Oh! they did not seem so frequent. I certainly heard them sometimes. There, now! did you hear that? Talk of the De-devil, and his saints appear."

His voice trembled when he spoke of the arch-fiend, as if he were half afraid something dreadful might happen to him for taking in vain the name of his Satanic majesty.

I listened and heard, as I thought, a heavy breathing; and a strange gurgle followed—a gurgle as if some one was seized by the throat, and forced to gasp and choke for breath.

"It's odd—very odd. I can't make it out; and what's more, I don't half like it. Anything fair and above-board I'm a match for; but I can't stand things supernatural."

"No, nor I," answered Woskin, taking hold of my arm—a familiarity which I did not resent.

"You won't mind me taking hold of your arm, will you, old boy?" he said. "This is all through having that long girl in the house. Get rid of her and we shall all be happy."

"You won't get to Liverpool so early as you expected," I observed; "we shall have to telegraph to Manchester for another engine, and shunt on to a siding till it arrives; hadn't you better go back by the next train, and sell your picture another day?"

"Will you take it and sell it for me? You can keep the money you get for it."

"No: I cannot do that. I am not at liberty to make use of your property without your wife's consent. Take it back, and go again to-morrow."

"Very well," he replied, looking a little crestfallen.

I knew he could not dispose of his picture to any dealers in Manchester, because they all knew his condition, and were fully aware that they would be taking a mean and despicable advantage of him if, as they naturally would feel disposed to do, they made a bargain with him in their own favour.

When we reached the station I assisted Mr. Woskin to get out, and stood for a moment on the platform talking to him, when a porter, who had been looking under the seat of the carriage we had just vacated, pulled out something which looked like a bundle of wool, and holding it up to Woskin, said, "Is this your dog, sir?"

"Dog! God bless me! where did you find that?" exclaimed Woskin.

"Under the seat, sir."

"In which carriage?"

"Centre compartment, carriage No. 368.6."

"That's it. That's my carriage," cried Woskin. "And you found the dog under the seat? No, it's not mine; I never saw it before. I know nothing about it."

I could not help smiling when I saw the dog, for it explained the breathing and horrid gurglings which had so alarmed both Woskin and myself. The station master approached, and thinking it was Woskin's dog, exclaimed, "Is that dog paid for?"

"No, sir. Nobody owns him."

"Then you had better tie him up, and keep him until we hear about him. Some one has lost him."

The porter placed him on the platform, and he sat on his haunches, as if perfectly satisfied with everybody and everything.

"Oh! I know him now," I exclaimed; "he often travels on our line. I don't know whose dog he is, but I have frequently seen him get into a carriage and go backwards and forwards: at Manchester we call him Bob."

This may seem an exaggeration, but it is nevertheless perfectly true. That dog Bob would travel from Manchester to London by the morning train, take a stroll in the streets, and go back again by the night mail as naturally as if he had been a Christian. His sagacity was wonderful. I have been told that Bob's former master was killed in a collision; and the dog may have fancied that by going from place to place he might find him.

The mystery of the strange passenger, however, was not

cleared up, nor did there seem much likelihood that it would be. I was as much perplexed as Woskin, and I confessed myself fairly puzzled. My heated fancy might have created the resemblance between the picture which hung over my bed-room mantel-piece, and the strange traveller who had nearly terrified the life out of the poor picture dealer.

I sent Woskin home in the next down train, and went on to Liverpool, when an engine arrived to take the place of the one which had so inopportunately broken down.

The day passed. Woskin went home, and was duly scolded by his wife, who took the picture from him, and placed it, with other valuables, under lock and key. Not being a superstitious man, I would not accept the theory of a haunted carriage or an optical illusion, to explain what I had seen. I determined to employ all the means at my command to unravel the tangled skein and elucidate the mystery. There was a poor fellow who was in the habit of hanging about the station, picking up odd jobs, such as calling cabs, moving luggage from one place to another, &c. He was called Roving Jack, and was well known to me. I called Roving Jack to me one day, and said, "I have a little job for you, Jack, if you like to undertake it."

"I am on then, sir," was the ready reply.

"Well, come with me to my lodgings, and I will explain and tell you what I want done."

He accompanied me to the picture shop, and I pointed out the portrait which hung over the mantel-piece. "Look well at that," I said, "and then go about everywhere and see if you can find anyone like it. If you discover a gentleman with that face, watch him home, learn who he is, and come and tell me. I will reward you. You may come inside the station, if you like, and watch the passengers. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," replied Roving Jack; "I see what you want done, sir, and I'll take care that it shall be done, if possible."

"Very well. I depend upon you."

Some days elapsed before I had any report from Roving Jack. He disappeared from his accustomed place outside the station, and there was a rumour that he had been knocked down by a carriage, run over, and taken to the hospital; but this turned out to be untrue, for when next he came to me he was perfectly well, and hale and hearty.

"Well, Jack," I exclaimed, "have you found that out for me?"

I fully expected he would reply in the negative, but I was surprised to hear him say—

"Yes, sir, I have."

"You have?" I cried.

"I've found somebody as like the picture as one pea is to another."

"Well—you astonish me!"

"I've done my best, sir."

"Who is the gentleman?"

"Mr. Vandyke, sir," replied Roving Jack; "he lives about ten miles from here, and has a house near the line."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, drawing a long breath.

"They say he is a director of the company," added my friend Jack.

I said no more, but at once rewarded Jack, who went immediately to his pet public house, and proceeded to get drunk. The next Sunday was a holiday with me. It was what we call my 'Sunday off,' and I amused myself by walking over to Mr. Vandyke's. I found that he had a charming place, and that it was as Roving Jack said, near the line. The railway had cut through his property. Mr. Vandyke was at home, and consented to see me, meeting me in the hall. I was not in uniform, and he did not know that I was a company's servant.

"Well, my man, what is it? What do you want with me?" he exclaimed.

I did not speak. The likeness between Mr. Vandyke and the picture was so striking and overwhelming, that I was unable to take my eyes away from his fine, expressive face; he wore a coat made of black velvet, and I heard that he was habitually sad, having lost his wife only a twelvemonth before.

"May I ask you a question, sir?" I exclaimed.

"As many as you like," answered Mr. Vandyke, sitting on a table in the hall, and looking steadfastly at me.

"Did you travel in a train from Manchester about a fortnight ago, when the engine broke down?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I was guard of the train, sir, and I have my reasons for asking."

"Very well, then, I will answer you. I did travel in that train."

"You did not take a ticket?"

"No."

"And you let yourself into the carriage with your own key?"

"I am a director, and it is frequently my habit to do that."

"You did not enter at the platform, sir?"

"You are right again. I had been to the engine-shed, and to the workshops in the rear, and I did not reach the train till it was in motion," said Mr. Vandyke.

"One more question, sir. When the engine broke down and the train came to a standstill, you got out and walked across country?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Vandyke, "your assertion is again correct. I found that I was near my home, and that it was unnecessary for me to go to the station. Now I come to think of it, I remember a guard following me some little distance; but as I walked along by the side of a hedge, I lost sight of him."

"That's it, sir!" I exclaimed, with a triumphant laugh; "it is all as clear as daylight now."

Mr. Vandyke, however, was still in the dark, and he would not be satisfied until I had explained the whole affair to him. He laughed heartily when I told him about Woskin, and the terrible state of alarm into which he had been plunged. He was especially interested in my description of the picture which he expressed a desire to see. Mrs. Woskin brought it to him, and he gazed long and earnestly at it, declaring at length, that it was a family portrait which had some years ago been stolen by burglars from Vandyke Hall. Wishing to regain possession of the lost treasure, he made Mrs. Woskin a handsome offer, which she did not think it worth her while to refuse. And so ended the adventures of the Strange Passenger.



ⅩⅤ.—MR. HASELDINE'S STORY.

On the night of the twentieth of March, A.D. 18—, precision is not a matter of overwhelming importance, so we will refrain from fixing the exact date—a great honour and surprise was in store for the Royal Mail, its worthy landlord, and those who frequented the generous hostelry. When the pensioners had assembled, as was their custom, and had shut themselves in from the blustering March wind which howled along the road outside, making wind echoes, like a bullying tyrant a he

was, suddenly the door opened, and a gentleman entered. Every one immediately rose, and made an inclination of the head, for one and all with pleasurable astonishment recognized Mr. Haseldine, the amiable chairman of the South Western and all that part of England railway, to whom most of them had been many times indebted for numerous acts of kindness and consideration, when in the service of the Company.

"I hope I don't intrude!" he exclaimed, in a cheery voice.

"Not at all, sir. Proud and happy to think that you should honour us with your society," replied Dawkins, who took upon himself the part of spokesman.

"In that case I will trespass upon the hospitality of the host, and ask for some punch."

"A glass of punch, sir?" inquired Mr. Tench, who was trembling with delight and nervous expectation.

"A glass! certainly not. Bring a bowl; and if you haven't a bowl large enough for us all, bring a bucket."

The thoroughly British word "Hurrah!" trembled on the tongue of more than one pensioner; but being well behaved, and desirous of preserving an appearance of decorum, they held their peace, though audible murmurs of approval were allowed to escape them.

"I was desirous of judging for myself what degree of comfort you enjoy, my worthy fellows," said Mr. Haseldine, approaching the fire, and warming his hands thereby; "and being in the neighbourhood this evening, I thought you would not object to my giving you a look in. Now, may I ask how you pass your time?"

"Well, sir," said Dawkins, with some timidity observable in his manner, "lately we have originated a sort of story-telling club; and having all been on the line, we can most of us rake up a reminiscence, and so the time goes by of an evening without our knowing how quickly it does go."

"Capital! There is nothing like innocent amusement," said Mr. Haseldine.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Tench entered with a very large china bowl, filled with smoking rum-punch. Glasses were procured and filled, and all went merry as a marriage bell. A curious twinkle was to be seen in Dawkins' left eye; subsequently it extended to the right, and looking at Mr. Haseldine, he said,—

"I hope, sir, you will not be offended if, on the behalf of my fellow pensioners and myself, I ask you to spin us a bit of a yarn. We should be more proud of that than of anything."

This proposition was heartily and unanimously applauded. Mr. Haseldine looked a little confused, as he replied, "'Pon my word, you take me by storm. I have never plumed myself upon a facility for story-telling, and moreover, I am sure I could not tell you anything connected with the line."

"That don't matter, sir. If you think you can tell a story about anything, we shall be only too happy to listen to you with the utmost attention."

"Since you press me," replied Mr. Haseldine, "I will endeavour to relate a tale of country life in the North of France. It is not sensational, but it has its pathetic side, and will, I hope, interest you nevertheless. I find that by intruding upon you this evening, I am taxed more heavily than I bargained for; but am prepared to pay the penalty. Landlord, fill the punch-bowl, and mind you make the mixture strong enough."

Pipes were charged and glasses filled. Every one disposed himself in an attentive attitude, and prepared to listen to Mr. Haseldine's tale of François Valgean :—

François Valgean, or as he was more commonly called, François, lived in a small cottage in a pleasant little village in Normandy, not far from Caen. Innumerable parasitical plants and creepers climbed all over the walls and the porch, which was heavily laden with clematis and jasmine, to say nothing of honeysuckle and white and red roses.

François was getting into the sere and yellow leaf, although his back was as yet unbent, and he could do a day's work in the vineyards in summer, and chop wood in the forests in winter, as well as any body in all the village of Narboisette.

His wife had died when he was quite a young man; and as he loved her with all the fond, time-enduring love of youth, he could never make up his mind to marry again, although he was passionately fond of children, and would have given worlds to have had his cottage peopled with the innocent prattlers, who would have been the companions of his old age. Madam Valgean had died in childbirth. Her husband never thoroughly got over her loss; the untimely event threw a blight and a chill over his existence; he was like a tender exotic nipped up by a hard frost.

After some years the parents of his little grandchild, Guillemette, died, and the poor girl was thrown upon the parish. The parochial authorities were bound to maintain her, and would, in the execution of their duty, have been glad to do so; but François Valgean came forward with alacrity, and declared

that he would be happy to adopt the youthful Guillemette, who at that time was but two years old.

He tried to trace a likeness in her to his deceased wife, and so great is the power of the imagination, he succeeded in doing so. This fanciful resemblance endeared Guillemette to him to such an extent, that he loved her as if she had been his own child, and he would not have parted with her for the accumulated wealth of the universe.

Guillemette was François' darling.

When the winter came on, he used to wrap the child up in furs and flannel, and take her into the forest with him, and tell her to run about and pick up dry sticks for the purposes of fire-wood, and this she did with many a gay, light-hearted laugh, which made the old man thrill with pleasure, and caused his big and generous heart to leap in his breast.

With eyes upturned to the sky, he thanked Heaven with many a pious exclamation, for its inestimable goodness in vouchsafing him so great a treasure.

At length Noel arrived, and during that season of festivity little or no work was done. The landlords made the workmen a present of a few days' pay, and all was mirth and gladness, pleasure and rejoicing.

François Valgean was a good Catholic; he confessed now and then, and had the greatest reverence and respect for his priest, who was a Christian gentleman of the name of Antoine. Père Antoine took a great interest in his flock, and visited them all in turn in their homes. François, on the *jour de l'an*, made him a present of half a stack of wood, which was a fine thing to have in cold frosty weather, and the priest felt grateful for the gift; so much so, indeed, that he paid François a visit that New Year's Day, and went so far as to stay to tea. He took the young Guillemette on his knee, and patted her pretty light hair with his smooth hand, telling her she was a good girl, and he hoped she would always continue so; and Guillemette looked up with a satisfied pride, as if she knew that she was safe and secure in the arms of the parish priest, who was a man without guile, owing no man a halfpenny, and at peace with all the world.

"You ought to be a happy man, François," exclaimed Father Antoine.

"I am contented," replied François, with a sigh, which was long and deep-drawn.

"That sigh contradicts your assertion."

"No, father. It is only a tribute of respect to the memory

of one whom I can never forget. It will be a happy day for me when I can join her in heaven."

The priest crossed himself, and said, "The ways of Providence are inscrutable. No doubt the little child was sent to console you for your loss; you must not repine at your lot, my worthy friend, for there are many poor wretches who are worse off and have more cause for wretchedness than yourself. Well, I have to call at several places to-night. It is getting dark, and I must be moving. I shall see you at Mass next Sunday?"

"Assuredly, *Monsieur le Curé*," replied François.

"That is right. I wish you a very good night, François, and give you my best thanks for your hospitality."

"To which you are at all times most welcome," replied François, graciously.

The priest took up his hat, and prepared to leave the cottage.

"Bye," said the little Guillemette, toddling up to him.

"*Adieu mon enfant. Dieu vous garde*," answered the priest, gently pressing her tiny hand, which was outstretched with all the charming grace of infantine simplicity.

"Shall I accompany you with a lantern?" asked François.

"It is not necessary. I thank you for your thoughtfulness. The road is familiar to me, and I have not far to go."

Father Antoine left the cottage, walked slowly with the aid of his stick along the smoothly gravelled path, and opening the wooden gate, passed into the roadway.

He had not gone far, however, before he uttered a cry, and in his consternation gave vent to the slightly profane exclamation, *Jesu Marie!*

He had put his foot upon something soft and yielding; a faint cry, like that proceeding from a new-born infant, assailed his ears, and he knew that he had trodden upon something in which the vital spark was burning.

"François!" he exclaimed, at the top of his voice; "François! *au secours*, François!"

Hearing the terrified exclamations of Father Antoine, François placed Guillemette upon the hearth-rug, snatched up the candle, and ran into the road.

"This way," shouted the priest.

"What is it? Heaven defend us, Father Antoine! What is the matter?" cried François, trembling from head to foot, as if he were attacked with ague.

"Approach with your candle. There is something alive here. I heard it cry with my own ears," replied the priest.

François did not require telling a second time ; his curiosity was now painfully aroused. At first he had thought that the priest was attacked by robbers, who were despoiling him of the few francs he might have in his purse ; and he was glad to be undeceived on that point.

Giving the candle to the priest, he fell on his knees beside what appeared to be a coarse canvas sack ; the neck was, strange to say, tied with a piece of blue ribbon, which contrasted strangely with the roughness of the material. With trembling fingers François untied the ribbon ; and during the time he was thus occupied, he repeatedly heard tiny wails, such as are uttered by infants, proceeding from the interior of the sack.

"Had we not better take the sack indoors, reverend sir ?" asked François.

"As you please," was the reply.

François raised the sack up with great care and tenderness, and preceded by the priest, bent his way to the house ; there they were more at their ease and free from interruption.

François put his hand in the mouth of the bag, and drew out a fine healthy child about six months old, and laid it on the hearth before the fire. It was elegantly, if not richly attired, and evidently was not the offspring of common people.

"Try again," said Père Antoine, with a smile.

François did so, and produced another child, who appeared to be about the same age. There was no similarity in their features, so that it was easy to see they were not twins. The second child was also well dressed, and had a superior appearance.

"Really this is a most extraordinary adventure !" exclaimed Father Antoine, looking into the fire perplexedly, and then at François, then at Guillemette, and afterwards at the newly discovered infants ; "I am much confused, and am altogether at a loss. I can come to no satisfactory conclusion."

François was quite as much puzzled as his spiritual adviser and friend, and stood scratching his head without deigning to make any remark whatever.

"Some one must, by design, have laid the children where they were found," continued the priest ; "that I have little or no doubt about. Some wicked and bad mother either wished to get rid of her offspring, or was desirous of concealing her shame and getting rid of the evidences of her frailty."

"But although they are about the same age," interrupted François, "they do not bear any resemblance to one another. I should say, sir, with all due and proper deference to your au

thority and superior wisdom, that two bad and wicked mothers must have had a hand in it. There was more than one finger in this pie, your reverence."

"It is strange! People are worldly, and have not the fear of God before their eyes," soliloquized the priest, musingly.

"Does your reverence remember a carriage stopping in the road about half an hour ago?" exclaimed François, whose brain was suddenly perforated with an idea.

"I do remember it, now that you recall the fact," replied the priest; "what inference are you prepared to draw from that?"

"Simply this: that the occupants of the carriage must have left the sack."

"The thing is plausible."

"It could not have been lying there long, because if it had, somebody passing by would have run up against it or trodden upon it, as you did yourself."

The two children began to cry, as if determined to show their discoverers that their lungs were in good order.

"What is to be done with the little innocents?" inquired the priest; "they are foundlings, and we have no hospital about here. Perhaps at Rouen——"

"Do not say another word, sir," cried François, eagerly, "I am fond of children, and shall be glad to adopt them."

"You?"

"Yes; I am not afraid."

"Is not the one you have already sufficient for you?"

"No. In the matter of children I am insatiable. If I should at any time not be able to save sufficient money to buy bread for them, I have no doubt the parish will assist me, for I shall be doing its work and relieving it of a burden."

"You are a good citizen, and the village of Narboisette should be proud of you," replied the priest, admiringly, "I think your philanthropic intentions do you infinite credit; but I am unwilling that you should be overburdened."

"Do not fear that. Dame Villiance, who lives next door, will be glad to come in and mind the babies while I am at my work, provided I give her some dinner for her trouble. Oh! we shall get on well, sir; I am only glad of the chance. These boys will be a comfort to me in my old age, and I thank Heaven for the timely gift."

Father Antoine made no further objection, and taking about fifteen francs in silver from his pocket, he gave it to François, saying, "It is all I have at my disposal just now. Take it;

you will have to buy a few things for your adopted children."

With tears of gratitude in his eyes, François accepted the money, and the priest shortly afterwards took his departure, promising to call the next morning, and render him whatever assistance lay in his power.

As soon as Father Antoine had gone away, François Valgean ran in next door to summon Dame Villiance to his aid. She came willingly, and was in raptures with the children, to whom she promised to devote her time to the best of her ability.

Guillemette took a great fancy to the babies, and played with them, much to their satisfaction and delight.

The foundlings got over all the illnesses peculiar to children, and grew up with a rapidity which was most gratifying to the good and generous François.

When times were hard and the frost came, and the winds blew with keen and icy blast, and François could not go to the forest, Father Antoine sent him presents of money and provisions, which helped him to tide over the evil days.

So passed seventeen years, and François' hair was tinged with the silver of old age. The foundlings were young men, and Guillemette a handsome woman, on the look out for a husband.

The foundlings had been christened with great pomp and solemnity by Father Antoine. One was light, the other dark; the light-haired one, François declared, should be called Fanfan, because it was a dear child; the other he called Angèlus. Rumour said that Guillemette was in love with Fanfan, but Rumour is a mischievous busybody, and often asserts things which are baseless and untrue.

In the year 1747 François Valgean was within a few months of attaining the Scriptural limit of human existence; he could only labour occasionally, and in spite of all his efforts and of those of his three children, as he called them, he could not continue to make both ends meet. He strove hard enough to do it, but fate was against him, and he was beaten at every turn. Neither Fanfan or Angèlus could earn the same wages as a full grown man, and sometimes work was scarce. When this happened François was hard put to it; he hardly knew which way to turn; and although Father Antoine helped him to some extent, he was compelled to borrow money, which he did on several occasions, in small sums. These small amounts, though they were trifling and insignificant in themselves, when added together, became formidable.

Laroche, the village usurer, to whom François had gone in his distress, began to grow impatient for the return of his money, and he called upon the poor old man and threatened him with ruin and destitution, if his debt of a hundred and twenty crowns was not repaid within a week.

François went to all his friends and appealed to their generosity, but he was unable to scrape together more than fifteen crowns, which was but a drop in the ocean, when compared to the sum total.

Armed with this meagre instalment, he paid Laroche a visit, and was ushered into a room containing a few articles of furniture, a well-blackened fireplace, and a clean sanded floor.

"Good day, François! sit down," exclaimed Laroche, in a harsh metallic voice peculiar to him; "I presume you have come to liquidate my debt?"

"No, sir, I have not. I am sorry to say I cannot get the money you require—if time were given——"

"Time! remember my good fellow, you have had time enough. If I give you an extension of time you will not get into a better position; you will go from bad to worse, that is what you will do, my friend; and as you have not brought the one hundred and twenty crowns with you, I am surprised at your audacity in venturing near me."

"I thought that you might be inclined to listen to a reasonable proposition."

"I am always ready to do that; what is your proposal?"

"I may have it in my power to pay you by instalments."

"Of how much?"

"Say ten or fifteen crowns at a time."

"Not enough."

"I have fifteen with me now."

"Give them to me," cried Laroche, sharply.

François, eager to conciliate the man, produced a small canvas bag, and took from it the fifteen crowns, which he handed over the table to Laroche.

"That is something. That will reduce our debt to a hundred and five crowns. Now I will be generous; I will tell you what I am inclined to do."

François' heart fluttered; he thought that Laroche had relented, and was going to falsify his hard-like and miserly nature, and belie the tradition of his bringing up, and of his whole life.

Simple-minded François! He was honest enough himself,

and he judged others by his own standard. Fatal mistake! but one which it is easy to make.

"Since you have had the integrity to pay me something on account," exclaimed Laroche, "I don't mind giving you a fortnight instead of a week, to rake up the remainder of the money due to me."

"What!" cried François, aghast, "have I parted with my money, only to procure anegative advantage. I might manage to give you a few more crowns in a fortnight, Mr. Laroche, but my obtaining the entire sum is out of the question. I could not do it."

"In that case I am sorry for you," replied Laroche, coolly, letting the crowns fall into his desk and chink against one another as they fell.

"Have you no pity?"

"None whatever, where money is concerned. What do men call me—a usurer. You in your heart despise me, although you do not disdain to make use of me in your pressing necessity. If I were to forego your debt altogether, men would only look upon me as a simpleton, fit for nothing but a madhouse. No, my friend, I must have my money. I worked hard enough for the small capital with which I began. I have gone without the bare necessities of life sometimes, in order to obtain an extra franc to lend to a poor fellow who promised an exorbitant interest for it."

"I shall have to go to the workhouse," said François, with tears in his eyes, "if you enforce your claim."

"You should have thought of that before you borrowed the money."

"You will break up my small home."

"I cannot help that; you ran a risk, and you must take the consequences."

"Are you resolved to sell me up?"

"Certainly I am, if I do not get my money."

"Then it is all over with me!" cried François, covering his face with his hands. "God knows I have always been willing to work, but somehow, I know not how, my limbs have got stiff, and I cannot move so lithely as I used in days gone by; I suppose I am getting old and want rest. It is hard in my old age to be turned out of house and home, and for no fault of one's own."

"You shouldn't have picked up foundlings, and kept a lot of big fellows, who are fitter for soldiers than anything else."

"Christian charity!" replied François, gently.

"Christian hum—— well, we won't say the other," exclaimed Laroche, coarsely.

"I shall have my reward."

"Possibly; but give me a bird in the hand."

"Well, well. Heaven is merciful, Mr. Laroche, and I will put my trust in it still," said old François, rising from his chair, and walking towards the door.

"Don't forget!" Laroche called after him. "In a fortnight's time. Fourteen days, do you hear? or the broker will be put in. Don't forget, my worthy François!"

The old man was not at all likely to forget..

He went slowly towards his cottage. It was early spring, and the trees were shaking the snows of winter off their naked boughs, which promised soon to give evidence of vitality. Guillemette was sitting at the porch, spinning. Fanfan and Angèlus were standing together by Guillemette's side, talking about indifferent matters. Both of the young men were out of work, and consequently compelled, though much against their will, to idle about. They all knew that the old man had been borrowing money for some time past; and they were equally well aware that the usurer Laroche was pressing for payment. François had told them at breakfast that morning, that he intended to call upon him, and see what impression he could make upon his flinty heart.

Fanfan exclaimed "Well, what luck!"

"Bad enough in all conscience," replied François, shaking his head dismally.

"Won't the old shark listen to reason?" inquired Angèlus.

"I am sorry to say he will not; he is as obdurate as a rock. I have done everything in my power to move him, but without success. He took the crowns I collected from my friends yesterday, and said that in consideration of my having paid something on account, he would give me a fortnight's grace; but if, at the expiration of that time, I did not pay the money, he should put the bailiffs in possession, and have me sold up."

"Infamous!" said Fanfan.

"What a scoundrel!" ejaculated Angèlus.

"Oh! the monster!" exclaimed Guillemette, leaving off spinning, and great was her indignation.

"Only to think," she added, "that he should make up his mind to turn us out of house and home. I hope some one will treat him in the same way, when he grows old and can't work don't you, Fanfan?"

"He will have his deserts," replied Fanfan; "never fear that my pretty Guillemette."

For some time no one spoke; a deep gloom had fallen upon all. Suddenly Fanfan said, "I shall not be at home to-day at dinner time, so you must not wait for me."

"Where are you going?" asked François.

"I shall run over to Caen."

"That is a good walk."

"Only a score of miles, there and back."

"What takes you there, Fanfan?" asked Guillemette.

"A little matter of business."

"Oh! if you want to be mysterious, I'm sure I don't care about knowing," she said, with a toss of her head.

"You will know when I come back, *ma mie*."

"Very well, sir. I shall know how to treat you when I have a secret which you would like to know all about."

"A pleasant walk," said François.

"Thank you."

"Shall I go with you?" inquired Angélus.

"You can if you like; but I think you had better stop at home with the old man."

"I would rather go with you."

"Come along, then," replied Fanfan, who took his pipe from his pocket, filled it with tobacco, and lighted it.

The two young men set off together. Guillemette followed them with her eyes, which filled with tears of vexation; she was anxious to know where Fanfan was going and what he intended to do.

When the young men had gone some little distance Angélus exclaimed, "What are you going to Caen for?"

"What do you think," replied Fanfan, looking hard at him.

"To see if you cannot do something for old François."

"Exactly."

"Your intentions may be very well meant, but as we have no friends or acquaintances at Caen, I really don't see in what way you can be successful."

"I have an idea of my own."

"You were always a clever fellow, Fanfan,"

"Much obliged to you for the compliment. I'll see if I cannot turn this same cleverness to some account. There is nothing like trying. The idea of François being sold up is intolerable to me."

"And to me also."

"He has done so much for us. He took us in when our unnatural mother deserted us. Monsieur le Curè has told me the tale a score of times."

"We owe him a great deal," said Angèlus, in a feeling tone.

During the remainder of the walk, both Angèlus and Fanfan were wrapt in meditation. At last Caen was reached. Fanfan made a few inquiries of the different *Servants de Ville*, with whom he came in contact, and stopped suddenly at a cabaret having the sign of the *Dernier Sou*, situated in the rue Frongnignac.

A man in a military garb was standing at the door, and he no sooner perceived the young men than he exclaimed, "Ha! my fine fellows. Glad to see you. Had a long walk, eh?"

"Nothing to speak of," replied Fanfan.

"Come inside and have a glass of cassis."

"I have no objection. Are you Mr. Ramponneau?"

"That is my name. What may you want of me?"

"I'll tell you presently," replied Fanfan.

Ramponneau was a recruiting sergeant, stationed in that part of France.

In the year 1747 soldiers were scarce in France, and high bounties were given to young recruits who willingly joined the service, one volunteer being worth a dozen pressed men.

Angèlus opened his eyes to their fullest extent, wondering what his friend was going to do, and what there could be in common between him and so fine a gentleman as M. Ramponneau.

The *Dernier Sou* was one of those badly-built, ill-ventilated low-roofed taverns, so common on the continent, and somewhat analogous to many of the tumble-down roadside ale-houses to be met with on this side of the Channel.

Ramponneau led the way into the bar, and called for some cassis, a mild liquor made from cherries, something resembling raspberry vinegar. Fanfan just put his lips to it and said, "No, thank you; if this is all you intend to give me I would rather drink at my own expense than at yours."

"Well said, my young gamecock," cried Ramponneau, patting him on the back; "I like spirit. *Pardieu!* I like spirit. Call for what you like; Madame Fadette can put it all down in the bill."

"I'll have some brandy, since you are so generous."

He was supplied with a dram of brandy, which he drank at a draught, and as soon as he had emptied his glass he called for some more.

"Another glass!" said the recruiting sergeant. "That's right; that's a good sign. I like to see a man take to his liquor kindly. A young fellow like yourself would be an acquisition to the army. Have you a fondness for the service?"

"Oh! yes. *Vive la gloire!* That is the cry, is it not?"

"Right again. There is nothing like glory. Love your king and your country, and——"

"Three cheers for Madame de Pompadour!" interposed Fanfan, with a sly smile.

He was not altogether ignorant of what was going on in the great world, of which Paris at that time was the centre.

The recruiting sergeant laid his finger on his lips, and said "Hush!"

He did not wish, in the perilous state of the times, to identify himself with any party. It was impossible to say who might be a spy, and who might not. His watchword was "The king!" There could be no harm in loyalty, so he contented himself with crying at all convenient times and seasons, "Hurrah for the king!"

"More brandy, Mrs. Fadette," exclaimed Fanfan; "I am going to take an important step to-day, and I want something to brace up my nerves."

"How would you like to join the army in Flanders for three years, and fight the Dutch and English?" said Ramponneau.

"I hate the English, and it is no crime to kill a Dutchman."

Fanfan tossed off his third glass of brandy in a careless manner.

"Well said again," cried the sergeant; "the youngster's got some stuff in him." He added, *sotto voce*, "I'll see if I cannot lime the twig for him in a tempting manner."

"A soldier's life is a happy one. You may be a field-marshal some day; the highest rank is open to you. I wish I were campaigning now, instead of hanging about these country taverns. If it was not for Mrs. Fadette here I should languish and go mad."

The landlady, who was a pretty buxom widow of five-and-thirty, smiled, and to avoid M. Ramponneau's roguish glances, retreated to her parlour or *sanctum sanctorum*.

"As timid as a hare!" remarked the sergeant. "Fancy a French woman being afraid of a soldier. I give you my word, Mr.— shall we say Rustic, as I have not the pleasure of knowing your illustrious cognomen?—I give you my word that I never yet—that is, until to-day—met a woman who ran

away from a French soldier. They are at all times the incarnation of tender politeness ; at all events, 'The ladies, God bless 'em.' I love them all, and they know it. But to return to our subject. The life of a soldier is a happy one."

"You said that before," remarked Fanfan.

"You are sharp, my young tulip. They have kept your nose pretty close to the grindstone, have they not?"

"Not particularly. You had better call upon them and see. A little of the sharpening process would improve you."

"Capital! my juvenile powder-burner. Excellent! *sur ma foi*."

"Go on. Tell me about the French army. It's a pleasant subject, and I like to be instructed."

"Good again. We must have you. I can't part with you, my rustic friend. You will be invaluable to the service."

"What will you give me to join?"

"Your hat full of crowns."

"How much would that be?"

"Give us your hat, and let me see the size of it."

"There you are," said Fanfan, handing him the hat. "Be careful how you handle it, because it's a new one."

Ramponneau smiled, and after handling the hat for some time, and pretending to measure it with a piece of string, said, "It will hold fifty."

"Not enough, my boy," exclaimed Fanfan, with a knowing look at Angélus.

"We might squeeze another score in."

"Won't do."

"Well, *sacré bleu!* a hundred. You are hard to please. Will that content you?"

"No."

"Then the devil may take you and your hat too," cried Ramponneau, who was beginning to lose his temper.

"I thought I should be invaluable to the service?"

"*Coquin!*"

"I thought you couldn't part with your rustic friend?"

"*Diable!*"

"Come, my good Ramponneau, I don't want to be hard upon you. Make it a hundred and ten, and I'm your man. *Et je suis votre âme, damnée.*"

"It's a good deal of money, but in time of war we must stretch a point now and then. You shall have the money."

"When?"

"To-night, if you wish it. I have only to go to the Pré-

fecture and apprise the mayor of the circumstance, and the thing's done. Do you want the money to-night?"

"Yes; without delay."

"*Bon, mon camarade!* you shall have it. *Allons au préfecture.*"

Angèlus caught hold of his friend's arm, and said, "Fanfan, what are you about to do?"

"A mere trifle. I am tired of being a dependant. I am going to kill two birds with one stone."

"How?"

"I shall get François Valgean out of his difficulty, and I shall at the same time do something for myself. This decisive step is laying the foundation-stone of my fortune."

"Do not be rash."

"Oh no! I have well considered the matter."

"Your friends will miss you."

"Not more than I shall miss them, my dear fellow. Now look here," he continued impressively, laying his hand upon Angèlus' arm. "Which is the better?—that François—good, sterling, admirable François—should lose his house, his bit of land, and his furniture, and that we should all go to the work-house; or that a strong healthy young fellow like myself should enlist, pay François' debts, and make my way in the world into the bargain? Surely the latter."

"I am convinced; but it is hard to lose you."

"Were I to stay, there would be many worse hardships to put up with. Come with us to the préfecture. I will sign the roll, and hand you over the money to take to François, and thus save him from Laroche."

"Will you not return with me?"

"How can I do so when I am enlisted? I shall not be my own master," returned Fanfan.

"That did not occur to me."

"I will endeavour to contrive matters so that I shall see you once more before I go to the seat of war. I shall first of all be drafted to the nearest dépôt to have my drill. I have only enlisted for three years. At the end of that time I will come and see you."

"So be it," murmured Angèlus, with a mournful sigh.

Fanfan went to the wars, and his crowns went to Narboisette, where, it need not be stated, they were peculiarly acceptable. Laroche was paid in full; and as François settled the claim against him, the usurer said, in his dry way, "What did I tell you? If I had not put the screw on I should not

have received my money. If I had yielded to your prayers and entreaties, you would have made no effort to pay me; the interest upon your debt would have been accumulating day by day and hour by hour, and you would have been a lost man."

François made no reply; he only troubled himself about the receipt. Having secured that, he was going away, when Laroche said, "Stay a moment. You are not going without a glass of wine."

"Thank you, I am not thirsty."

"That is unfriendly."

"I would rather not."

"Are you angry with me for trying to get my money? What a hard life I lead! Dear me! it is enough to disgust one with the world. You should be grateful to me because I helped you in the hour of your need, and only charged you fifteen per cent., which is no more than the law allows to the *Mont-de-piété*. It is simply pawnbroker's interest. Why should you fall out with me because I try to get my money back again, when I have a more eligible investment for it? Does not every tradesman and every merchant look sharply after his money? Of course he does."

François steadfastly refused the proffered glass of wine.

"Well, well," said Laroche, "Go your way. I will not quarrel with *you*, although I can see that your mind is fully charged with venom against *me*. If you should at any time get into difficulties again, call upon me. I shall be most happy to oblige you, in spite of your discourteous behaviour this morning."

"I hope and trust, Mr. Laroche, that I shall never have occasion to ask your assistance again," said François, solemnly.

"There is no telling; all things on earth are uncertain. Anyhow, I shall be glad to see you, as I said before. I like a client who pays promptly, like yourself. Selling a man up goes against the grain with me, *voisin*, and, whenever it is possible, I always avoid it."

François left the usurer's house, vowing in his heart that he would never enter it again; but the saying that "man proposes and God disposes" is as true as it is old. In less than six months François Valgean had an attack of rheumatism, which deprived him of the use of his limbs. This great calamity laid the unhappy man upon a bed of sickness. Guillemette did all she could to make money, and so did Angèlus, who, however, met with a misfortune.

As he was in the forest, carting wood to Narboisette, his

foot slipped, and the wheel of the waggon went over him, breaking one of his legs. By this dispensation of Providence two of the bread-winners of the little family were incapacitated from working, and hard times again set in.

François could not avoid again asking the assistance of Laroche; gladly would he have avoided doing so, but it was out of his power.

Father Antoine would have willingly assisted him, but his slender income did not permit him to do more than give occasional relief, and that only to a small extent. The priest had all his life been one of those God-fearing, single-minded men, who can feel more for others than they do for themselves. When a young man, Father Antoine had influential friends, both at Rome and in Paris, who, admiring his talents and his energy, frequently offered to promote his worldly interests, but he would not listen to them. He preferred a life of labour and hard work, with penury as his portion, to luxury and wealth; for he thought that the former was more calculated to procure his everlasting happiness than the latter.

Laroche lent his money freely, as he had done before, and did not charge an exorbitant amount of interest. First of all, François put his house in pawn. Secondly, he borrowed money on his little bit of meadow land, and his cow which gave him milk.

It was very heartrending, but there was no help for it. Angèlus would have followed Fanfan's example, had not his broken leg placed in his way an insuperable obstacle to such a course.

Laroche's money tided them over the ensuing winter very comfortably, but they one and all dreaded the summer, for they knew that they would be evicted.

Angèlus was pronounced out of danger and fit to go about again after six months' severe illness. François was not so lucky; his limbs were racked with rheumatism, and he was incessantly tortured by sciatica.

The drama that had been played before, was, with certain variations, repeated. Laroche was in want of his money, and as it was not forthcoming he determined to distrain. He was tired of his mortgage, and he wished to foreclose. He knew that, although François had his equity of redemption, he was too poor to resist the attack of his creditor.

Accordingly, Laroche instructed the bailiff of the town to advertize François' property for sale by public auction.

Although Angèlus was able to walk about without a crutch, he could not do much work—he was too weak.

In this strait Father Antoine remonstrated with Laroche, and agreed to pay him his interest weekly, until either François or Angèlus were able to work and earn money. The usurer entertained this proposal, and for two years this arrangement was adhered to. Angèlus assisted the priest, and between them they contrived to satisfy the rapacity of Laroche.

Angèlus would have gone away as Fanfan had done, but Guillemette entreated him with her pleading and eloquent eyes not to leave her; and for the life of him he could not summon up resolution enough to do so.

At the end of the two years Laroche would wait no longer. He gave all parties concerned, clear, formal and legal notice that he would sell in a month's time.

During the entirety of the three years not one line had the family received from Fanfan. The battle of Fontenoy had been fought; and it was conjectured that the young soldier had perished on the field of battle.

Guillemette had given up spinning, as not being sufficiently remunerative, and had found employment in the house of a wealthy gentleman living in Narboisette. He was a man of rank; but although generous, and even munificent at times, he was far from being a favourite with the people, few of whom, if any, liked the Baron d'Alvera. There was something repulsive and repellant in those shaggy, overhanging brows, those sinister eyes, now scintillating with the cunning of a cat, now burning with the ferocity of a wild beast.

He had a niece who lived with him, and who was reputed to be a great heiress. People said that she would inherit fabulous sums when she came of age, which would be in a year and a half. She was lavish in her expenditure of what money her uncle, who was her guardian, allowed her. The poor blessed her; and Ma'm'selle Blanche, as they called her, was deservedly popular amongst a class of people who would rather have a five-franc piece given them than a bran new Bible, and who only care about listening to sermons when they are bribed to do so.

Blanche gave Guillemette some needlework to do, and remunerated her well for her trouble.

The final catastrophe could no longer be avoided. The day of the sale arrived, and the bailiff of Narboisette called upon François to inform him that, unless he paid the money he

owed Laroche, everything he had in the world—even the bed upon which he was then lying—would be sold. François' only reply was a prolonged groan, which plainly enough denoted the excruciating nature of the agony he was suffering. It was very hard to be torn from the old place,—to be dragged away from his cherished articles of furniture, many of which had their histories and their associations. That was his ill-fated wife's favourite chair; that patchwork quilt she made with her own hands, before she was married. I might extend the catalogue of articles endeared to him by the memories of former years, but it would only be a painful task.

Angèlus sought François in his bed-room, on the morning of the day on which the sale was advertised to take place.

"What's to be done," he said; "I declare that I am at my wits' end."

"It is the will of Heaven," responded François, meekly.

"Say rather it is the will of Laroche," cried Angèlus, who was beside himself with passion; "*Hein!* if I should have the good fortune to come across that fellow on a dark night, God help him, for he will stand in need of assistance."

"No, no; I beg of you not to talk in so wild a manner," replied François; "I was once inclined to think as you do, but long weary months of suffering have made me change my opinion. The man lent me the money, and I knew his conditions before I borrowed it. Where then is the harm of asking for it back again? We are unfortunate, Angèlus; I wish that Fanfan had never gone away, to leave his bones in a foreign land."

"He may come back again."

"I have my doubts," said François, shaking his head; "I have very grave doubts."

"We must hope for the best."

"Undoubtedly."

"What are we to do? *dans cette galère.*" persisted Angèlus, who was thinking of the main chance.

"I am unable to answer you. We are in the hands of Providence."

With this unsatisfactory answer, Angèlus was about to go away, remembering the saying, that "Providence only helps those who help themselves," when there was a timid knock at the door, followed by a still more timid request of, "May I come in?"

Angèlus immediately recognized Miss Blanche's voice; his heart beat violently, for he had often watched her fairy-like

form, as she tripped along the street on some errand of mercy and love. He had wished, as he gazed, that he had been born a gentleman and brought up in respectable society, so that he might have offered his hand and heart to one whom he considered a paragon of beauty.

Blanche D'Alvera entered the room in a gentle manner, gave Angèlus a nod of recognition, and approached François' bed. "I hope you are better to-day," she exclaimed. "I have come to comfort you under your affliction, if you will allow me, and if you will not think me impertinent and intrusive."

"Many many thanks, my dear young lady," replied François; "I stand in need of all the comfort that my friends can give me, for this is the hour of my tribulation."

"It is a cruel business altogether."

"Still I have had the man's money."

"That is true. If I were my own mistress I would cheerfully discharge the debt for you, but that is unhappily out of my power. I have, however, brought you some jewels, which I shall not miss, but which Mr. Laroche may feel inclined to accept as an equivalent for your debt. Will you accept them?"

François' eyes dimmed at this offer, which he felt he could not accept. It was kind of Blanche D'Alvera to make him a present of her jewellery, but he respectfully refused to accept it.

All her power of persuasion was exhausted in vain, in endeavouring to alter his determination.

"You refuse my offer?" she said, almost crying with vexation.

"I think it my duty to do so. Pray do not feel offended."

This was the only reply she could obtain from him, and she went away considerably crestfallen, yet with the consciousness of having done her best.

According to the French custom, the notice of sale had to be affixed to the church-door some time before the public auction took place. As the bailiff had omitted to do this the day before, François was respited for twenty-four hours.

Angèlus, after in vain trying to persuade François to accept Miss Blanche D'Alvera's offer, walked into the market-place, where the bailiff, accompanied by a drummer-boy, had just arrived.

"Ohi! ohi! good people all. Oh! good people of Narboissette. I am here to announce the sale of a house and paddock belonging to one François Valgean, a working man, who has

got into difficulties, and borrowed money without being able to repay the same: therefore his goods are confiscated by law, and go to the Crown—no I don't mean that—hem! Therefore his goods, his house, and his land will be sold at public auction at twelve of the clock to-morrow morning—ohi! ohi!”

The worthy bailiff was becoming slightly confused, and had forgotten his set form of words, which was rather remarkable, considering he had held the position of sheriff's officer and town-crier for the best part of his life.

Seeing that the populace assembled in the market-place did not receive his proclamation with the boisterous acclamation it deserved, he said to the drummer-boy, “Strike up!”

The little fellow let the drumsticks descend upon the parchment, and speedily awoke the echoes sleeping in the market-place of Narboisette.

The bailiff took a piece of paper from his pocket, which was a printed official notice of the sale, and advanced to the church-door to affix it there.

During the whole of this scene, Angèlus had stood clenching and unclenching his fists, and showing other signs of excitement. When the bailiff moved towards the church-door he followed him with the palpable intention of wresting the paper from his hands, and tearing it in a thousand pieces, which he would have scattered to the winds.

Guillemette had fortunately sought the market-place, and had hitherto been unperceived by Angèlus; but seeing the danger into which he proposed to rush, she sprang forward, and caught him by the arm, exclaiming, “For Heaven's sake, Angèlus, think of the consequences of what you are about to do.”

“Let me go,” he said, savagely.

“No, I will not. I cannot see you go headlong to destruction.”

“Be calm, Angèlus,” exclaimed several of the villagers who happened to be standing round about, and watching the acts of the bailiff with melancholy interest.

“Be calm!” he repeated. “Oh! yes. It's all very well for you to say be calm—you who do not care for old François Vaguean—you for whom he has done nothing. Can I stand by and see the bed taken from under him—that bed upon which he is now lying in pain and agony? Can I see him turned into the street, homeless, shelterless, penniless, without food and clothing? Oh! it is easy to say ‘Be calm.’ But I should not be a man, or have the feelings of a man, if I were to listen to

you. What has François Valgean done for me ? Do you not all know the story ? is it not a household word in Narboisette ? Did he not take us in—Fanfan and me—when we were deserted by those who bore us ? Did he not clothe our nakedness, and bring us up for many, many years, until we were able to help him a little with our poor exertions ? Oh ! it is easy to say ‘Be calm !’”

This passionate outburst had the effect of giving vent to some of Angèlus’ anger, just as an escape of steam at a critical juncture prevents a boiler from explosion.

“For Heaven’s sake listen to reason, Angèlus,” cried Guillemette, who was apprehensive of a disturbance. “If you defy the law and interfere with the bailiff, you will be locked up and disgraced. In prison you will only add to François’ anguish, and it will be utterly out of your power to assist him in any way.”

During this altercation the bailiff had affixed the order of sale upon the church-door. Angèlus saw it, and was transported with rage once more.

“Look !” he cried, “is not that piece of composition—that rascally writing—a disgrace and a shame to me ?”

“Why for you ?”

“Because it was for me principally that the fatal debt was incurred. Did I not meet with an accident and break my leg ? Who kept me throughout my illness ? Who sold everything he had ?—Why, François. Then there is Fanfan—that brave, that fine fellow, Fanfan ; what did he do ? Did he not enlist and pay off this usurer Laroche ? Yes, we all know that he did.”

“You have comforted us all by staying at home. If you had both gone away, it would have been a great blow to grandfather.”

Angèlus turned away, and sat down on one of the steps leading up to the principal entrance to the church.

“I am almost broken-hearted,” he sobbed ; “I wish I had gone with Fanfan.”

“Fanfan was so unlike you, Angèlus ; he was always merry and laughing—he was as gay as the spring and as lively as the morning.”

“I can’t help my feelings,” replied Angèlus.

“Poor Fanfan ! I hope he has not been killed.”

“Have you heard from him ?” said he.

“Not I ; not a line. He would sooner have written to you.”

"Oh no, Guillemette; you were always his favourite. Perhaps he has been wounded or taken prisoner. It is now nearly three years since he enlisted; we may see him soon."

"Three years!" cried Guillemette; "it is more than that, I know. I am positive it is."

Father Antoine now entered the square, saying to Angèlus, "I regret beyond the power of words to express, that it should have come to this."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the notice affixed to the church-door.

"It will be the death of François," replied Angèlus.

"I trust not. I am prepared to give him an asylum for a while, until we can procure his admittance to the almshouses."

Angèlus made a wry face, as if the bare idea disgusted him.

"God is good," said Father Antoine; "He has protected François before, and it may be His will that that present suffering shall result in ultimate advantage."

Angèlus made no answer; his heart was full, he felt at war with all the world, and he could not listen with any degree of patience to the priest.

Finding that he could extract nothing from Angèlus, the priest requested Guillemette to lead him to François, whom he considered it his duty to comfort and console as well as he could.

"You will promise me one thing," said Guillemette to Angèlus.

"What is it?"

"You will not molest the notice of sale? Do not drag it down and trample it under foot, as I know you are desirous of doing. Leave it where it is—a disgraceful memorial of unbridled lust for gold."

"Rest easy," said Angèlus; "I will not touch it. My passion is over, and I am no longer violently inclined."

With that assurance Guillemette left him. Any overt act of violence would have only aggravated matters, and made them worse, for he would infallibly have been cast into prison.

The solemn booming of a bell was heard.

"The bell rings for vespers," muttered the people, who slowly dispersed.

Guillemette ran before Father Antoine, and led the way to François' cottage. Angèlus was left. He could not help feeling low-spirited and melancholy; a hundred times over he wished that he had accompanied Fanfan to the wars. "If I had done

so," he said, half aloud, "I should have been able to send my pay to François and Guillemette. Oh! how much better it would have been, than staying here to see François sold up owing to his kindness to two poor foundlings. If he had not had so many mouths to feed, he might have passed his old age in peace in the delightful society of his charming daughter; for although I am not so ardently attached to Guillemette as Fanfan used to be, I cannot shut my eyes to her virtues and excellencies.

The shadow of night began to descend upon the village of Narboisette, and still Angèlus remained upon the steps of the church, oblivious of all around him, engaged with his over-absorbing thoughts. He cursed the usurer in his heart; and with his lips he cursed him, wishing that he could remove so stony an individual from the earth, whose surface he encumbered.

A footstep sounded through the square, which was now, with the exception of Angèlus, altogether deserted; the faint light which yet remained, sufficed to show Angèlus that the new-comer was the money-lender, Laroche.

"Oho!" he said, in a smothered voice, "this is a golden opportunity; I shall be able to say my mind to the ruthless destroyer. Oho! wait a bit, my amiable friend; I shall have something to say to you presently."

Pulling his hat over his eyes, and raising the collar of his coat, so as to disguise himself, he got up, and approaching Laroche with faltering steps, said in an assumed voice, which was principally distinguishable for a thoroughgoing beggarly whine, "Kind gentleman, help a poor man. Just one sou, kind gentleman?"

"Not a halfpenny," replied Laroche, buttoning his coat over his breast.

"Just one, kind sir?"

"No, I tell you," replied Laroche, roughly.

"Ha! scoundrel, thief, wretch, rascal!" exclaimed Angèlus, throwing off the mask; "you did not know me, but you shall. Oh! if I only had a razor or a sharp knife to draw across your throat, perhaps your heir-at-law or your executors might be more merciful."

"Mis-mister Angèlus," stammered Laroche, "upon my word you surprise me. You-you do, indeed. I never expected to meet you here."

"No; I don't suppose you did; but here I am."

"I don't mean you, Angèlus," said the usurer, trembling with apprehension. "It is not you; it is François Valgean."

"Very well. Be it so. Do you not know that my interest is identical with that of François Valgean? Don't you know that when you turn him into the street, you expel me also, and my foster-sister Guillemette? You are a hard-hearted scoundrel, M. Laroche, and as I have had the good fortune to meet you alone this dark night, I shall not allow you to depart until I have given you an overwhelming proof of my great regard for you. Do you hear me, Monsieur Laroche? you shall not leave this spot until I have given you a striking evidence of my affection for you!" vociferated Angèlus.

Laroche grew alarmed, and endeavoured to make his escape; but Angèlus held him tightly, and began to pummel him in the most unmerciful manner, saying, "Take that, and that, you jew, you rascal, you thief of the world! Take that, and that, you money-lending scoundrel! I mean to teach you something. I intend that you shall hesitate in future before you sell up poor people, who have done you no harm, and who pay you fair and lawful interest for your money."

Laroche cried out for help at the top of his voice; he shouted, he screamed; he even squealed like a rabbit; he gave utterance to all sorts of noises, but no one came to the rescue.

All at once the sound of a trumpet and a drum was heard; the players approached rapidly.

A band of recruits bound for the wars was passing through the town. The sergeant in command of them hearing the terrible noise made by Laroche, pushed on with great rapidity, and was soon upon the scene of action, followed by his men.

It was our old friend Ramponneau, who at last had received orders to join his regiment in Paris, whilst another man took his place in the provinces. This translation was very agreeable to Ramponneau, and he obeyed the summons with alacrity, bringing with him all those whom his final efforts at recruiting had succeeded in enlisting.

Three years had altered both himself and Angèlus, and they did not recognize one another, when Ramponneau seized him by the arm, saying, "Come, come, that will do, my young hero, without you particularly wish to kill the gentleman. As far as I can see, the old party has had enough of it."

"Not half so much as he deserves," replied Angèlus, gasping for breath.

"I—I give him in charge," said Laroche; "he has assaulted me. Lock him up, the miscreant!"

"Certainly not. I have seen no assault. Neither am I a *gendarme*."

"Perhaps he will enlist," he said to himself; "he looks a likely lad."

"I shall go after the police," said the money-lender, who was determined to make the very best use of his liberty.

"Go along. Make haste, or else you will not find them at home; they told me they were going out courting to-night," cried Ramponneau, giving him a push which nearly destroyed his equilibrium. Laroche needed no further bidding; he was off like a shot. The recruiting-sergeant then turned his attention to Angèlus, and said—

"Come, my lad, I don't know who you are, but if you want to sleep out of gaol to-night, you had better come with me."

"I don't care where I go," responded Angèlus, sullenly.

"That's right. You are just in the frame of mind for me I like to meet men when they are disgusted with fate and fortune—come along."

The young man suffered himself to be led away passively.

Ramponneau marshalled his recruits, and led the way to the principal *auberge* in the village, where he intended to sleep that night, after billeting his men upon such of the unwilling inhabitants as the authorities might select.

Angèlus had some money in his pocket, and he drank brandy very much as Fanfan had done some time before, when three years ago he had enlisted in the army of France, and resolved upon fighting the battles of his country.

"What are you?" he said to Ramponneau.

"A recruiting-sergeant, an' it please you, and very much at your service. Can I offer you anything in your way this evening. Would a few score of crowns be of service to you?"

"Bait your hook with gold and silver, and nine times out of ten you will catch your fish," muttered Ramponneau, to his trusty lieutenant, who smiled archly, having proved the truth of the remark in his own person.

"They would, indeed," replied Angèlus; "I would give anything in the world for six or seven score of crowns."

"Serve your King, that is all you have to do; become a soldier, and the money is yours."

"You will give it me?"

"Some on the nail my lad, if you want it."

"Let's see it," returned Angèlus, who was slightly sceptical, as to the ready payment of so large an amount.

Ramponneau took a leathern purse from his pocket, and laid it with great solemnity upon the table before him.

Before he opened it he said, "My unbelieving young friend wishes to see the colour of the King's money, Adolphe."

"Hem!" replied a recruit, answering to his name with military precision.

"Have you or have you not received a hundred crowns?"

"I have," replied Adolphe, putting his hand in his pocket and chinking the remainder of his money one piece against the other.

"Edouard?" continued the sergeant.

"Here!"

"Have you received a hundred crowns, or not?"

"I have them in my pocket now, wrapped up in my *mouchoir*."

"Good!" exclaimed Ramponneau. "Tristam?"

"Do you want to know about my hundred crowns? If so, I can tell you I have spent them all, and should not at all object to another hundred."

A general laugh followed this reply, and Ramponneau said, "Wait till your time of service is up, *mon brave enfant*, and then you can enlist again and obtain another hundred as you wish."

"I accept your offer; give me the money," cried Angélus.

"Not to-night, my son; wait till to-morrow. It is always bad to pay money at night. Call for what you like, and I will be your banker. Come, lads, fill your glasses; let us be merry—there's nothing like it."

"Give us a song, Edouard," cried some one.

Edouard seemed accustomed to the appeal; for, without waiting to be asked twice, he trilled forth a lively ditty, full of sentiment, which took his hearers by storm; and in this jovial way the evening was passed by a dozen or so of young men who, for a few pounds, had consented to become food for powder.

The Baron D'Alvera was a magistrate of Narboisette, and it was incumbent upon Ramponneau to get his accounts passed by some one having authority in every parish in which he rested during the night. So, after having made inquiries in the town, he resolved upon submitting his figures to the Baron D'Alvera. The recruiting-sergeant was told that the Baron was a very wealthy man, and as a rule he had found rich people rather inattentive to business than otherwise. The worthy sergeant knew that his accounts would not stand very severe scrutiny, for he had occasionally falsified them. He had frequently given a simple-minded recruit twenty crowns and charged the government with the full bounty; that was a favourite subterfuge of his, and he never hesitated to do it when

the opportunity offered itself. The day before arriving in Narboisette he had enlisted a man of the name of Loulon, who worked for the Baron D'Alvera. He was a silly young fellow, whose head was full of ideas respecting martial glory.

Ramponneau had given him only fifteen crowns, and in his accounts he had made an item of "Loulon, able-bodied, full bounty."

The Baron D'Alvera, on seeing this item, remembered that only a short time ago Loulon had called upon him to wish him good-bye, and had stated the fact of his having received fifteen crowns.

"What is the meaning of this, 'Loulon, full bounty?'" he asked.

"Why, you see, Baron," replied Ramponneau, "he was a simple-minded young fellow."

"Ha! ha!" cried the Baron; "I have caught you, have I? You admit that he was a 'simple-minded young fellow.' So I should think; but how does it happen that you have here charged the full bounty for him?"

"If it is 'full bounty' in my accounts; it is correct," said the sergeant, with consummate effrontery.

"That remains to be proved, my good man," said the Baron D'Alvera; "as it happens, Loulon used to work for me, and came here to wish me good-bye, before taking a final leave of Narboisette, and while here he told me that he had only received fifteen crowns from you. I have detected you. The accounts are falsified; you have robbed the State, and your punishment will be commensurate with your offence."

Ramponneau tried to put a bold face on the matter, and replied, "That, my Lord, is an assertion which at present requires proof," and he stroked his moustache with military fierceness.

"I shall not require it for any great length of time; I have only to send after Loulon, who cannot as yet be far on his way, and the matter will be cleared up at once."

Ramponneau hesitated; he did not know whether to persist in his defiance, or to yield submission to his lynx-eyed antagonist. On consideration he elected to take the latter course. He thought it would be better to throw himself on his lordship's mercy.

"You need not send for Loulon, Baron," he said. "I may perhaps have made a mistake, and in time of war I hope you will think it excusable."

The Baron D'Alvera always liked to have men in his power;

he found that if he could hold the sword over a man, he invariably made him a good tool and a good servant.

"You have done wisely in submitting. You are undeniably in my power; but on certain conditions I will agree not to hand you over to the authorities, who would prosecute you with the greatest rigour.

Ramponneau bowed.

"I am going to Paris," continued the Baron, "with my niece, Miss Blanche, and I shall want a trusty servant; never mind what for—that is my business. It is sufficient for you that I want one. Perhaps from the number of your recruits you will be able to supply my wants?"

"Let me see," replied the sergeant, counting on his fingers: "you want a man?"

"Yes."

"Only one?"

"Only one."

"I picked up a smith at Caen, three days ago."

"Without doubtful antecedents?"

"Once in a row in a tavern, he knocked half a dozen teeth down a friend's throat."

"He won't do; who's the next?"

"I can offer you a shepherd of Lavigny, furnished with the very best certificates."

"Has he a family?"

"He has a father and mother, and twelve brothers."

"Oh! the devil; he won't do for me."

"I have a Bretteville miller; he is a first-rate fellow, like a ship at Lloyd's—A 1, copper-bottomed, and all that. He never saw either his father or his mother."

"He is, of course, unmarried?"

"A widower, with one small brat."

"He will not suit me!" replied the Baron, impatiently.

"Will you kindly tell me what you want?" said Ramponneau, who thought the Baron rather hard to please.

"I want—I want a young man who never had father, mother, or any relation with whom he was acquainted. I want one without any tie, either past or present."

"I'll do my best to get the sort of *pauvre diable* you wish for, Baron."

"*Diantre!* I must have my choice; I am not going to put up with any tame horse you choose to bring me."

"Faith, Baron, you are particular; but, as I said before, I will do all that a man can do, and I cannot say anything more."

"Well, listen to me?" said D'Alvera. "I shall give you five days; at the expiration of that time I shall expect to see you in Paris."

Taking out a pocket-book, made of Russia leather, he wrote something upon a piece of paper, and then gave it to Ramponneau.

"Can you read that?"

"I think so."

"What is it?"

"'Madame Bontemps, rue des Etuves, Saint-Honoré.'"

"Do you know her?"

"No, my Lord."

"She is the celebrated card maker; a woman devoted to M. De Maurepas, who is a great friend of mine. Mind you bring me at least two recruits. Do you understand me? Two recruits at *least*, so that I may have my choice?"

"If I please your lordship, will you do me one favour?"

"If you deserve it."

"Give me back the account I have just rendered you, so that I may be out of your power, and that the episode of Lou-lon may be forgotten."

"Oh yes, I will promise that."

"I shall then leave the service; my ambition is to take a public-house."

"That will cost money?"

"Yes; but brewers will lend a certain loan to a reliable and trustworthy person."

The Baron D'Alvera laughed.

"At what are you amused, my lord?"

"At the idea of your calling yourself a reliable person."

"The Government," replied Ramponneau, with a burst of candour, "was made to be deceived; with a private individual I should be honesty itself. To deceive the State is venial; to deceive a fellow-creature is a crime."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Monsieur D'Alvera, "you are an amusing fellow, Ramponneau. Serve me faithfully for three months and I will give you back your *acompte rendue*, and make you a present towards your tavern. What will you call it?"

"I shall call it the Royal Drummer, kept by the famous Ramponneau," replied the recruiting-sergeant, who was on the best of terms with himself.

"One thing, my friend, is certain——"

"And that is——"

"In three months' time you will either be lodged in prison or be the proprietor of a public-house."

"There is little doubt which."

"So be it."

"My choice is made."

"Good morning; you have the address?"

"Safe in my pocket."

Ramponneau took his departure, and muttered to himself, as he went, "I have made a bargain with a man I never saw before; I hope he is not the Devil in disguise. He is clever at figures—unquestionably clever at figures. He bowled me out at once, and took my middle wicket. It is an isolated case; I must be on my guard, and take care it does not happen again. Such a *contretemps* is a disgrace to a clever man like myself. I wonder what he will exact of me; I hope nothing terrible, although I confess I tremble already."

As he walked through the streets he met Angèlus, who said, "I am glad I have met you, for I have been looking all over the town for you."

"I am always to be found."

"No doubt; but not always at the time most convenient to those seeking you," said Angèlus.

"What do you want?"

"Is it clearly understood that we leave for Paris to-night?"

"No; to-morrow morning. We cannot travel in the dark, and some of my fellows are so badly shod, they require rest."

"I have signed the roll."

"And I suppose you are in need of the money—eh, my boy? Some little sweetheart perhaps wants the money?"

"Never you mind who wants it."

"Here you are," replied Ramponneau, producing his leather purse and counting out the money, which Angèlus stowed away in his pocket.

Just as he had received the last coin, he said, "Silence!"

Guillemette had been to matins, and was just leaving the church. Angèlus did not wish to be seen by her, in close conversation with the recruiting-sergeant.

Guillemette went with a sad step towards François' cottage, and did not notice Angèlus, for her head was bowed in sorrowful meditation.

"You are at liberty to-day," said the recruiting-sergeant; "but you must report yourself at my quarters this evening. We shall march at break of day."

"Never fear; I shall be ready."

Suddenly a large concourse of people began to flow into the market-place. Men, women, and children came from all di-

rections. In the midst of this crowd the bailiff was perceptible. In an hour's time the sale of François Valgean's house was to take place; but the public is always desirous of getting a good place at such ceremonies, and therefore the people of Narboisette had made up their minds to be in good time.

Angèlus followed Guillemette, but she walked so quickly, that she had reached the door of the cottage before he had turned the corner of the square. When he arrived, he found her in close conversation with Miss Blanche d'Alvera. His heart beat quickly, for Blanche was his ideal of feminine beauty, and although he had not as yet openly confessed it, he would have willingly and proudly made her the angel of his heart.

Blanche was saying as he came up, "I have called once more to wish poor old François good bye."

"Are you then going away?" said Guillemette.

"To-morrow the Baron and myself leave for Paris."

"Indeed! That is news."

"Political affairs demand his presence."

"I have one regret," said Guillemette; "and that is, we shall lose a kind friend and a good lady."

"I wish that François would accept the poor present I offered him. His pride made him refuse my jewels. They are not very valuable; but they would, perhaps, help him out of his difficulty."

"Is it true, Miss Blanche, that you are about to quit Narboisette?" said Angèlus.

"I am sorry to say it is true. I cannot leave the old place without feeling a pang of regret. I shall quit my dear valley, and the house where my mother died."

"I remember seeing her sit at the window for hours together, working at something intended for the poor. Oh, she was an excellent, a most estimable woman. Sometimes she would have me at the house, and teach me to read and write."

Suddenly Miss Blanche d'Alvera said, "I wish you could accompany me to Paris."

"I cannot leave my grandfather."

"Would not his other niece Alison wait upon him?"

"Possibly, if all went well."

"I will speak to the Baron, and see how this matter can be arranged. Perhaps I can prevail upon him to pay old François' debt, and if he is in a good humour he will consent to your going to Paris with me."

"To Paris? Oh, how delightful!" cried Guillemette, whose heart beat high with expectation.

While this conversation was taking place, Ramponneau walked towards his *cabaret*. Just as he reached the door, and was thinking about the propriety of taking a glass of wine, a man on horseback rode up. Ramponneau jumped out of the way, for the cavalier made as if he would run him over. The new-comer was dressed in military costume, and seemed, from his attire, to have served in the cavalry.

"Hullo, my clod-hopper! It seems to me that you have seen a pair of breeches which are unknown to you," cried the stranger. "Are you afraid of me?"

"Excuse me——"

"Don't beg my pardon. I have nothing to forgive, my soft-spoken gentleman. It is not I whom you have chagrined, but it is——"

"Whom?"

"Zémin."

"Who is Zémin?"

"My horse. Will you beg his pardon?"

"Most willingly," said Ramponneau, entering into the spirit of the joke.

He approached the horse and said, "Miss!"

"Oh yes, it is a lady," said the cavalier.

"*Bien!* Miss, I hope I have not frightened you excessively? I regret very much having stood in the middle of the street, which ought properly to belong to you."

"That will do. Zémin is the most forgiving of animals. I cannot bear to see dumb creatures ill-used. But Zémin is generous, and you ought to consider yourself fortunate."

Zémin became restive and pranced.

"Be quiet!" cried the stranger. "Just hold Zémin a moment, will you?"

"With pleasure."

Ramponneau advanced and caught hold of the bridle, whilst the stranger alighted. He proceeded a few yards down the street, and stopped at François Valgean's cottage. He could see no one through the window, although he tried his hardest to be able to do so.

"I wonder where Angélus is," he murmured, "and Guillemette."

Presently he returned to Ramponneau, saying, "Zémin has had nothing to eat."

"Come along, you sir," cried the sergeant; "I am not going to hold your horse all night."

"Nobody asked you."

"Take the bridle yourself, then."

"Take off the saddle and give the horse some water; I dare say I can find a few sous for you."

"A few sous! *Sacré de——*"

"I say, don't swear; you'll catch no fish," interrupted the stranger. "Here! lay hold of the bridle. You don't look a bad sort."

"Neither bad nor good," grumbled Ramponneau.

"Come, my friend, help me to unsaddle Zémin."

"Help you!"

"Yes. I should think, by the look of you, that you have nothing better to do."

"You are very much mistaken then. What do you want the horse unsaddled for?"

"Why, my amiable rustic, you don't suppose I am going to enter the house on the beast's back?"

"Not exactly. But you didn't tell me that you belonged to this part of the country. Is this your horse?"

"Yes; just as much as Versailles belongs to the king."

"Is your time of service up?"

"A week ago; and I have my discharge signed and countersigned."

"By Jove! you are valuable when put together and classed in the same category."

"What do you think we are worth—my horse and myself? I always place my horse first, because I love her. She has saved my life more than once."

"I should say that you are worth eighty crowns, one on top of the other," said Ramponneau, eyeing both of them critically.

"Are you a valuer of men and horses?"

"Yes; and have been all my life."

The stranger went once more to the cottage window, but seeing no one in the sitting-room, he returned to the recruiting-sergeant, who attacked him again, saying, "I'll tell you what; I shouldn't mind buying you."

"Eh?"

"I will stretch a point, and say a hundred crowns for the pair of you."

"My friend, we are not in the colonies; and here, at least, slave dealing is not regarded favourably."

"Oh! you refuse my offer. Perhaps you have a father and mother here?"

"No; I have neither one nor t'other."

"What! A child of fortune?"

"Yes."

"You are unmarried?"

"Right again. I love the ladies, but I have not yet found one I like."

"You please me. What the devil do you want to leave the service for? Can't you agree with the cannon-balls?"

"Well, I don't know. I have been through two campaigns. I have taken part in three sieges, and I have fought in four pitched battles."

"Hurrah for Mars!" cried Ramponneau; "you ought to be of celestial origin. But I say," he added, with a wink.

"What?"

"Venus."

"What about her?"

"How are you situated as regards Venus?"

"Bah! I have had bad luck. Not a single duchess has taken a fancy to me."

"You dog!" said the recruiting-sergeant; "you are as playful as a kitten. You were born a soldier."

"So I think. The drums and fifes always made a fool of me," replied the stranger, who once more approached the window of François' house, muttering, "They have not stirred yet. Deuce take it! What's become of them all?"

"Come here, my fire-eater," exclaimed Ramponneau; "I have an offer to make you, and one worthy of your acceptance. Leave this place, and come with me to Paris this evening. I will draft you to the army in Flanders in fifteen days, and I will give you—yes, I will give you four hundred crowns. Think of that, my boy—four hundred crowns! I'll board you, I'll lodge you, and I'll put you into a good thing; but it's no use to talk about it here. Do you see? If you will accept my offer, I will give you the crowns sprucely and gaily."

The stranger took the saddle and bridle off Zémin, and put them on the sergeant's head in a playful manner, saying, "Take those sprucely and gaily to the stable."

"To the stable? Am I your groom?"

"It will amuse you, and do you good."

"Oh! all right; anything for a quiet life," replied Ramponneau, disappearing down a yard at the back of François' house.

The stranger patted his horse's neck and said, "What do you say, Zémin? He offers us four hundred crowns to go away just as we have arrived. It is a good deal of money, but

I should like to rest a little while. We have been a good deal knocked about, you and I. We have been blown here and there like a couple of butterflies. A ball struck me at Fontenoy, and a lance tore up your flank at Rocoux. Poor old girl! kiss your master. I think we have earned a little rest, have we not, my pet?"

Zémin neighed responsively.

"And after all," continued the stranger, "the village is so quiet and gentle. There is nothing like one's native air, say what you will. There is nothing like it. It will be sad to say good bye to the country, the roads, and the rivulets. I long to see the cows chewing the cud, the sheep, the apple-trees in full bloom, and afterwards the rosy-coloured fruit."

Just as he had finished this soliloquy, Ramponneau returned, and exclaimed, "It is done."

"Thank you. Did you see any one there?"

"Not a soul."

"I wonder where they all are."

"They! Do you know them?"

"I should think so. Now in return for what you have done for me—which in reality is little enough, seeing that I could have done it myself without much trouble—I will give a real mark of my confidence."

"By all means. Tell me who you are."

"Not at all. I shall confide Zémin to your care. Take hold of her gently. Now then, have you got her? That's right."

"But——"

"Trot away."

Just as Ramponneau was about to lead the horse into the stable, several villagers made their appearance; amongst them was Alison, of whom Miss Blanche d'Alvera had spoken a short time before, as one who would look after François in the event of Guillemette going to Paris.

"Oh! a soldier," she cried, starting back. "Have you escaped without being wounded?"

"Do you recognize me?"

"Let me see; you are called Thomas?"

"No. Look again."

Guillemette now came up and said, "We do not know you."

"Oh, I know you well enough. You are called Guillemette, and the other young lady Alison. Am I not right?"

"He knows our names," cried Alison, in an agony of curiosity.

Guillemette advanced a step nearer and said, "Oh no, he cannot. It is impossible."

"Is it impossible to embrace me?"

"Who are you—a neighbour?"

"No."

"Cousin?"

"Cousin German, forty times removed."

"Can it be Fanfan?" said Guillemette, under her breath.

"If you won't embrace, I must take something in my arms."

He ran after two or three girls and kissed them, saying, "I kiss you for the spring; you for the apples; you because you are young; you because you are pretty; you because you are little; you for the flowers."

"And me?" said Ramponneau, advancing with a jocular air.

"Oh! you for the plums," cried the stranger, catching hold of him, and placing him under his arm.

The beating of a drum was heard in the distance.

"Hullo! a drum. What's the matter now?" cried the stranger.

"It's for the sale," replied Alison.

"What sale?"

"Oh, François' house is to be sold."

"What are they going to sell it for?"

"Because he owes Laroche money, and can't pay it."

"Ha! Poor Father François going to be sold up!" exclaimed the stranger, with a heightened colour. "It seems to me that I have just arrived in time." Turning to Ramponneau, he cried, "I say, you fellow—you man-merchant! come here, I want you."

Ramponneau approached. The stranger struck Zémin gently with his hand, saying, "Feel here; she's sound enough, eh? Look at the harness; all new and good, eh? Now look at me; solid and sound as a bell, eh? Well, we are for sale, Zémin and I."

"We shall not fall out," replied Ramponneau; "I will stick to my bargain."

"It is arranged then, eh?"

"Yes."

The villagers now began to move to one side; for the bailiff, preceded by the drummer-boy, approached. The sale was going to begin.

Amidst the most profound silence, the bailiff exclaimed, "We are about to sell the house and land of François Valgean. For the convenience of buyers we shall make two lots,—

the field and the house. First of all we shall sell the field enclosed by that quick-set hedge. The price is a hundred and fifty livres. No one responds? Well then, a hundred livres, —at eighty,—at sixty.”

Father Antoine, who was present, said, “Fifty.”

“At fifty livres,” cried the bailiff. “Will any one bid higher?”

The cavalier, who had hitherto watched this strange scene with great interest, hit Ramponneau in the ribs, and said, “Step forward; bid, my good friend, bid.”

“What for?”

“The property, of course. I want it.”

Ramponneau advanced a few paces and exclaimed—

“Sixty.”

“The recruiting-sergeant,” said Father Antoine to Guillemette; “we never thought of him.”

The people seemed annoyed at a stranger bidding for François’s house, and a general murmur arose.

“What’s the matter now?” said Ramponneau. “Why shouldn’t I buy a lot of nettles as well as any one else?”

“Sixty-five livres,” cried Father Antoine.

“Eighty,” said Ramponneau.

“Eighty-five.”

“Ninety.”

The priest hesitated, and the sergeant gave vent to a triumphant laugh.

“Going at ninety,” cried the bailiff. “Will no one bid higher?”

At this critical juncture Angèlus advanced and said, “I will give a hundred.”

Both Guillemette and Antoine were surprised beyond measure, and said, “You, Angèlus?”

Ramponneau made a movement, saying, “I bid.”

“Stand still,” said the stranger, putting him back.

“Why?”

“Don’t you see it is Angèlus?”

“A hundred livres, a hundred. Nobody bids now. Knocked down!” said the bailiff.

The field was sold, and Angèlus was the purchaser.

Guillemette approached Angèlus and said, “Gracious Heaven! where did you get all that money from?”

“Be quiet. I will tell you afterwards, when I have an opportunity.”

The stranger also seemed surprised, for he muttered, “Where the deuce did Angèlus pick up all that money?”

Ramponneau overheard the remark, and said, "He got it out of my pocket."

"How?"

"I have enlisted him in the name of the king."

"Bravo, Angèlus! I did not know he had so much pluck in him," replied the stranger.

"Now then," cried the bailiff; "now, then, we shall sell the house. I put it up at fifty crowns. What do you say? Does nobody speak? At a hundred livres, then. Come, my friends, bid away."

The stranger bent down and whispered to Ramponneau—

"Go along! He has no more money."

"All right," said the recruiting-sergeant. "A hundred livres."

"And five!" exclaimed Father Antoine.

"One-fifty!"

"One fifty-five!"

"Two hundred!" cried Ramponneau, with the air of a capitalist.

"Oh! do bid higher, Father Antoine," pleaded Guillemette; "I will work very hard to repay you, I will indeed. Do, pray, bid higher; poor François will be turned out of his home else."

"This is terrible," murmured the priest, adding aloud, "Two hundred and five!"

"Bid higher," whispered the stranger.

"Three hundred!" said Ramponneau.

Father Antoine turned to Guillemette and said, "Alas, my poor child! They have more money than we. I have done all I can."

"Three hundred livres!" cried the bailiff. "You have all heard it. You are all satisfied. Sold."

"It is all over, then. Good-bye to the dear old house," said Guillemette.

Turning to the bailiff, she added, "Sir. Father Antoine has kindly consented to receive my grandfather, François Valgean, for a brief space. He will remove as speedily as his infirmities will permit him. Here are the keys; give them to the new owner."

The bailiff took the keys, and offered them to Ramponneau, saying, "Here, sir, are the keys of your house."

The recruiting-sergeant passed them gracefully to the stranger, saying, "You are at liberty to enter your property as soon as you like."

The stranger advanced to Guillemette and handed the keys to her, exclaiming, "If you would like to go into your house, pray do so."

Angèlus had been eyeing the stranger critically for some time, and at last cried in a loud voice, "Fanfan!"

Guillemette and the villagers congregated around the bailiff saying, "It is Fanfan!"

"Ha! found your eyes at last, eh?" cried the stranger. "You have been a long time recognizing me. Have three years so changed me? Am I so altered, Angèlus, that you cannot remember my features; eh, my friend, my second self?"

"Oh! I am *so* glad," said Guillemette; "this is all like a romance. Dear Fanfan, I am delighted to see you once more. We had given you up as lost."

"Let us go to François," cried Fanfan. "I am dying to let him know that I have not forgotten him."

"Fanfan," said Ramponneau, musingly. "It strikes me I know that name. I say, you sir. Didn't I enlist you at Caen three years ago?"

"Very likely, my worthy friend. Somebody did."

"It was I. There is an old saying, 'Once bit, twice shy,' but I'll hold to my bargain. Hullo! there is Miss Blanche d'Alvera."

Blanche issued slowly from the cottage. She had sought François once more with the futile intention of asking him to accept her jewels, and she had watched the progress of the sale from the window of the sick man's room.

"That is Miss d'Alvera, is it not, Angèlus?" said Fanfan.

"Yes. Is she not pretty?"

"Not so pretty as my Guillemette," replied Fanfan, putting his arm round her waist.

Blanche had hardly made her appearance, before the Baron d'Alvera strode down the street in a hasty manner.

"I have been looking for you, miss," he exclaimed. "Madame De Soudri is waiting for you. We leave Narboisette for Paris in an hour."

"Going to Paris?" said Fanfan to Angèlus.

The Baron and Blanche conversed together for a short time, then the latter approached Guillemette, and whispered something in her ear.

"And I too," cried Guillemette.

"And I," said Angèlus.

"Oh! If you are all going to Paris I don't see any reason why I shouldn't go, too," exclaimed Fanfan, assuming a philosophic demeanour.

"I am sure I don't care," said Ramponneau; "the Baron D'Alvera may have his choice now; and if he is a wise man he will have them both."

François was delighted to see Fanfan once more; and when he heard that it was by his sacrifice and his crowns that the house was not sold, he wept tears of joyous gratitude. It was arranged, with the concurrence of Father Antoine, that Guillemette should go to Paris with Miss Blanche D'Alvera, Alison consenting to look after François. Ramponneau and his two recruits travelled with the Baron, forming an escort not to be despised in those troublous times; and they did not regret having enlisted, for they saw plenty of service, and assisted the Baron D'Alvera in many ways. He was mixed up in the numerous Court intrigues that were rife in the capital, and the help of two stout, clever fellows was just what he wanted to protect him from the malice and the swords of his enemies. Laroché did not trouble François after the sale, and the poor old man found much consolation in Father Antoine's society and the kind attention of Alison. Guillemette did not marry either Fanfan or Angèlus; she attracted the attention of a Count Parteru D'Estcourt, who made her his wife, and raised her to his own level. When this happened, François had gone to his rest, and could not congratulate her upon her good fortune, nor could he smile when Fanfan obtained his General's commission, and Angèlus became a captain of the Hussars, and was the favourite *aide-de-camp* of the great Condé.

HOW AN EARL BECAME AN ENGINE-DRIVER.

THE next story was told by a reserved man of an elderly appearance, who was known as Prince. He had been a pointsman, and was not generally communicative in his manner; so that a story from him was looked forward to as an event; and Dawkins especially evinced a lively curiosity to hear the pointsman's unvarnished tale, which commenced as follows:—

One of the best landlords, and undoubtedly the most popular man in the county of Hants, was Earl Mount-Common. His estate was large, and his tenants numerous. His wealth was great, and he made it the means of doing much good, and in-

creasing the material prosperity of those with whom he was connected and associated ; he was descended from a long line of ancestors, and could boast of being the seventeenth baron of the name, in direct descent from Hugh Mount-Common, an adventurous Viking who followed the fortunes of William the Norman.

He lived at Peacock Rise, on the Hampshire coast, but his possessions stretched far inland ; many acres of forest-land belonged to him, and he could have made much money by cutting down his timber, and converting the virgin and long-disused soil into green pastures and ploughed fields ; but he would rather have lost one of his fingers than cut down a single tree.

The estate on the rise commanded a charming view of the sea, and was situated in the healthiest part of a salubrious country. At the time of which I am about to speak, his lordship was unmarried and fast nearing thirty, at which age social philosophers tell us a man is likely to become averse to marriage, and much in favour of ignoble bachelor existence.

His only enemy in the county, was a gentleman who, like himself, was possessed of large landed property. His name was L'Estrange.

His estates, singularly enough, adjoined those of Lord Mount-Common. The Mount-Commons and the L'Estranges had always been, more or less, at war with one another. There was a sort of hereditary feud between them, which had never been extinguished. Certain it was that they hated one another most cordially, though Lord Mount-Common would not have been averse to an amicable adjustment of their differences, had such a course been proposed and assented to by Simon L'Estrange.

A favourite ball with the county people, was that always given at the commencement of the hunting season, and known as the Hunt Ball. Both Mount-Common and L'Estrange were stewards of the ball, though the former took precedence of the latter, on account of his rank and social position. The Mount-Commons had always been masters of the hounds, keeping a splendid pack at their own expense ; and until the present L'Estrange became proprietor of the Ivories—that being the name of his property—the family had always been content to follow Mount-Common's hounds ; but from a feeling of silly and purposeless rivalry, Mr. Simon L'Estrange started a pack of hounds of his own, obtaining a small field to follow them twice a-week in the hunting season.

Lord Mount-Common smiled at this exhibition of independence; and he could well afford to smile, for the followers of his hounds comprised amongst their number the collective wit, talent, beauty and wealth of that division of the country.

Great preparations had been made for the ball, and care had been taken in issuing invitations, that none but the most worthy were included in the list. A slight quarrel in the committee-room took place between Mount-Common and L'Estrange, the latter wishing to exclude all those who held commissions in the various volunteer corps; but he was over-ruled, and deservedly.

The day upon which the ball was to be held was bitterly cold and bleak; October had seldom produced a day with so funereal an aspect, but the cloudiness of the sky and the gloomy look of the weather generally, combined with a shrill and wintry whistling of the wind, had very little effect upon the beauties of the county and their *beaux*, who, ensconced in comfortable carriages, laughed at the weather, which to them was of little consequence.

A very brilliant assemblage met at Castle-Hampton, the small town, in the civic hall of which the ball was to be held. All the local magnates were there, including the mayor and corporation of Castle-Hampton, who were present by virtue of their office; with them came wives and families, a gaudy and formidable array. There was first and foremost Lord Mount-Common, arm-in-arm with his only brother, the Honourable Douglas Downshire, Mr. L'Estrange of the Ivories, Sir Sampson Pennant, with his wife and daughter, and the Pennants of Hollyhill, the Trebars of Forest-Bracton, the Armitages of Rantry, the Wesley Phillips of Stanford Hall, the Blakeleys from the Grange, the Earl of Fallingwater and his family, Messrs. Pearson and Pontypool, the members for the county, all good men and true; and as the assizes were on, Mr. Hardbuck, Q.C., walking with Mr. Justice Denbigh, might have been seen; also that rising junior Mr. Raynham, talking vigorously with the leader of the circuit, Mr. Manningly, who would not yet "take silk."

The list might be extended indefinitely, but we have quoted enough to denote that the ball was a gathering of the clans, and an affair of magnitude.

The musicians were of metropolitan repute, having been brought from London for the express purpose of playing at the ball. Everything was arranged in good taste, and proceeded satisfactorily until half-past eleven o'clock, when the room was full and the excitement at its height.

It then happened that a lieutenant in the Castle-Hampton volunteer corps, having a great idea of his own importance as a member of the C.H.V.C., was strutting up and down in all the glory of a spick and span bran new uniform, all frogs and silver lace, when he stumbled over his sword, and in the fruitless endeavour to recover his balance, clutched at a lady's muslin dress, and in his frantic efforts tore the richly trimmed skirt from the gathers, and made it a shameful wreck and a disastrous ruin.

The lady in question was walking gracefully along with her husband when the untimely occurrence took place. Up to that time her dress had been the envy of many, now it was the laughing-stock of those who formerly were envious. The half-suppressed titters, and the audibly whispered jests of those around her, made the lady furiously angry.

One may rob a peacock of his gaudy plumage with impunity, and strip the bird of Paradise to the skin without so much as receiving a peck in return; the ostrich will part with his precious plumage; and a parti-coloured jay will do nothing more than scratch if his feathers are attacked; but tread upon a lady's dress—ruin the gorgeous skirt upon which the eye delighted to dwell—and it would be better to have a millstone tied round the neck and be plunged into the middle of the deep Atlantic.

The lady raised her moist eyes appealingly to her husband, and pointing to her torn skirt, uttered the monosyllable "Look!"

The appeal was not made in vain; the husband approached the confused member of the C.H.V.C., who had just recovered his legs, and after calling him clumsy and a bear, struck him with the palm of his hand in the face.

Now this was more than so distinguished a tradesman of Castle-Hampton as Mr. Squeers, could tolerate. Mr. Squeers would have apologised and made good the damage. It is even probable that if Squeers had not been in uniform, he would have tolerated the blow on the face, and have brought an action for assault and battery, but the Squeers' blood was up: The music, or the champagne and the frequent negus had assisted it to rise, and the gallant volunteer put himself in the most approved pugilistic attitude, and showed fight.

The gentleman whose wife's dress had been unintentionally torn, was a fox-hunting tenant-farmer on Mr. L'Estrange's property, and an active supporter of that gentleman's hounds. His name was Norris.

Out of little causes spring great events.

Had there been no Helen, there would have been no Trojan war; but we must not wish that, for in that case there would have been no "Iliad."

What in America is called a "free fight," at once took place between the excited Mr. Squeers and Norris the farmer, who felt himself injured through the damage done to his wife's dress. Mrs. Norris did not attempt to interfere. She looked ruefully at her dress, and contented herself with saying, "Give it him!" which was directly aiding and abetting her husband in committing a breach of the peace.

When the *fracas* was discovered at the end of the room, the stewards quickly made their way to the scene of action, to ascertain if it was not possible at once to put a stop to so disgraceful a scandal.

Lord Mount-Common and Mr. L'Estrange arrived simultaneously upon the spot, and the combatants were with some difficulty separated, and, with the aid of the police, ejected from the room. Lord Mount-Common made some little joke about separating the goats from the sheep, whereupon Mr. L'Estrange exclaimed, "The division has not to my mind been yet satisfactorily accomplished."

"And why not, pray?" asked Lord Mount-Common, elevating his eyebrows.

"I am of opinion that all the volunteers should be ejected. If my advice had been followed none of them would be here."

"Your advice was too illiberal to be acted upon."

"I would go still further," said Simon L'Estrange, drawing himself to his full height, which was something by no means despicable, he being a tall powerful man.

"Possibly you would do many things which are as interesting as they would be beneficial," said Mount-Common, with a sneer.

"I would at the time I ejected the volunteers, send their friend and champion with them," retorted Simon L'Estrange.

"Do you mean to apply that remark to me," said Lord Mount-Common.

"Of course I do. You are the only person enamoured with ruffianly and ill-behaved volunteers, therefore the remark can only apply to you," replied L'Estrange, coolly, while he stared insolently at his enemy.

"This insolence——" began Mount-Common, when he was interrupted and stopped by Morant of Barnby Moor, who said,

"For Heaven's sake remember where you are. You have been grossly insulted, but this is neither the time nor the place to take

notice of it. Be advised by me; I am an old friend. Listen to me, Mount-Common; listen to me, for all our sakes."

The Morants were well known in the county, and Mount-Common was well acquainted with them. He could not, however, bring himself to act upon this temperate suggestion. He had so often been crossed and thwarted by L'Estrange, that it was hard to be insulted by him before a number of the very best people in all Hampshire.

"No, no, Morant. I will not be bullied openly. I must say what I have on the tip of my tongue. Therefore stand away from me."

Morant fell back.

"I appeal to you, gentlemen," said Lord Mount-Common, with more moderation than was expected from him, "whether the conduct of Mr. L'Estrange is not quite as reprehensible as that of the volunteer, which he so much deprecates?"

"Quite," "Quite," "Clearly," "Very well said," "No question about it," "Much to blame," "Ought to know better," arose on all sides.

"If you don't approve of that, what will you say to this?" cried Simon L'Estrange, stalking up to Lord Mount-Common, whom he seized by the nape of the neck, struck twice in the face with his clenched fist, and then cast from him with tremendous force, as if he had been a senseless log.

A dead silence instantly ensued.

The thud of Lord Mount-Common's body, as it fell amongst some chairs and benches, was alone audible.

So determined and deliberate an insult took men's breaths away.

For a moment Mr. Simon L'Estrange stood erect and defiant amongst the crowd of gentlemen who surrounded him.

The ladies who were outside the circle, craned their necks to see what was going on, and spoke in whispers.

The musicians, with one accord, ceased playing.

Fortunately for Simon L'Estrange, the Honourable Douglas Downshire had left the room, or he would most assuredly have exacted a terrible revenge for the outrage upon his brother.

The gentlemen present were furious with L'Estrange, but though he had forgotten himself they would not do so. Instead of attacking him, they turned their backs on him in silent contempt, and went to look after Lord Mount-Common, who had more than once been called the popular idol.

He was lying on his back and breathing heavily. Four

gentlemen took him up and carried him into a small apartment contiguous to the ball-room, and the surgeon to the Castle Hampton Volunteer Corps, who fortunately happened to be present, very kindly interested himself to the best of his ability to effect his lordship's recovery.

On examination it was found that Lord Mount-Common was stunned by the violence with which he had fallen on the benches, but, though stunned, his skull was not fractured.

The surgeon applied those restoratives which were within his reach, and Mount-Common soon sat up, and recognized those about him. "You know me, old fellow, don't you? I'm Billy Morant," said one.

"Is—is it all true, Morant?" said Lord Mount-Common, looking wildly about him."

"Is what true, dear boy?"

"Did—did he *strike me*?"

"Unfortunately he did. His conduct was altogether shameful," replied Morant. "We have been talking about it since, and we have cut him, to a man. Our determination is unanimous. He will never hold up his head in the county again, if that is any consolation to you."

"A very poor one, my friend. But are you sure he struck me?"

"Oh yes! We all saw it. We consider that no disgrace attaches to you."

"The mere fact of a blow is an indelible disgrace," replied Lord Mount-Common, testily. "Do not try to delude me; you are talking to a sensible man of the world. I have been more than insulted; I have been dishonoured."

"We all think that L'Estrange behaved like a consummate blackguard," said the Earl of Fallingwater, "and I will take most excellent care that so much as his shadow never darkens my doors again."

This sentiment was warmly applauded by all the gentlemen present, but Lord Mount-Common's soul was dark and heavy within him, and he would not listen to a word of consolation or of comfort. The fact, which could not be blotted out or glossed over by any kind of sophistry, stared him in the face. Mr. Simon L'Estrange had struck him, and tossed him about as if he had been a bale of goods or a field turnip; and this, too, in the presence of the *élite* of the county. What could be more humiliating and disgraceful? The very thought of it, apart from the smart of the blows, was intolerable.

They had laid the injured man on a sofa, and thinking he

might like to go home, Morant asked if he should order his carriage.

"No," was the faint reply: "many thanks for your kind solicitude, but I should prefer staying here alone for a short time. I am anything but well. If you can come to me in half an hour——?"

"Of course I can, and will with the greatest pleasure," replied Morant, who added, "Lord Mount-Common, gentlemen, is desirous of being alone for a little while."

At this, everyone went away, and Mount-Common was alone. His mind was a chaos of varied emotions. He was driven frantic by the reflection that his enemy had triumphed over him, and that he had been subjected to infamous treatment in a public room. He panted for the olden days when duelling was permissible. If he could only have called Simon L'Estrange out and exchanged shots with him, it would have assuaged his misery, for, at least, he would have had the chance of killing him.

This satisfaction was denied him.

He lay upon the sofa in a feverish state, restless from his wounds, or, more strictly speaking, hurts, which began to pain him, and the perturbation of his mind, which made him toss about like one delirious.

Half an hour elapsed with speed.

At the expiration of the appointed time, Mr. Morant returned, carrying in his hand a goblet of iced champagne. This he offered to Mount-Common, telling him it would do him no harm; consequently it was drained to the dregs.

"What do people say about me?" inquired Lord Mount-Common.

"Oh! they all take your part. A universal feeling of sympathy prevails."

"And the ladies?"

"Are in accord with the men. They consider L'Estrange's treatment of you a monstrous outrage, and an unpardonable breach of the laws which regulate the conduct of gentlemen."

"That is so?"

"Undoubtedly. What shall you do now?" said Morant.

"How do you mean, what shall I do?" asked Mount-Common, with a startled look.

"Shall you go home?"

"Yes, I think so. My mind, Morant, is in a frightful state of uncertainty and suspense. I know very well what I ought to do, and yet I would give the world for guidance. You

know that Simon L'Estrange and I have never been the best of friends, in spite of my having endeavoured, times out of number, to conciliate him. He has a bad, vindictive spirit, and has often gone out of his way and inconvenienced himself to annoy me."

"I am perfectly well aware of that. Your quarrels with L'Estrange have been the after-dinner conversation at many tables in the county," said Morant.

"Where is he now?" inquired Lord Mount-Common, abruptly.

"Just this moment gone, I believe."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Do you happen to know where?"

"I do not. I only know that he found himself shunned and avoided by everybody; and that after walking up and down for some time, out of sheer bravado, he took himself off. He asked two young ladies to dance with him, but they indignantly refused."

"Who were they?"

"One was a Wyatt, of Wistdale. I don't know the other. Then he sat down at a card-table, and everyone got up. He saw that his society was anything but agreeable to the people in the ball-room, so he very prudently made up his mind to go away—a most praiseworthy determination."

"Gone, I think you said?" remarked Lord Mount-Common, abstractedly.

"Oh, yes. No doubt about that. Let me see you to your carriage; or perhaps now that the coast is clear, you would like to go into the room?"

"I!" cried his lordship, while an expression of horror pervaded his aristocratic face, "*I* go into the ball-room! Oh! my dear fellow, you must be joking. How can I show my face with this heavy disgrace hanging over me?"

"Certainly it is unpleasant, but you will be a martyr, if not a hero, and that is——"

"Nothing to me," hastily interrupted Lord Mount-Common. "I have been infamously used; all the blood in my veins is boiling, and I can see nobody."

"In that case, go home. Shall I accompany you? Command me if you think I shall be of the slightest use to you."

"Not now. I can scarcely bear my own society, and you would irritate, rather than soothe me. Thank you very much for your offer."

"I will at least go to the door with you."

"As you please,"

Descending to the hall, his lordship put on his great coat and hat, and shaking his friend by the hand, went away, declaring that he could, without any difficulty, find his carriage at the hotel. He had not ordered it until two o'clock, and it was then scarcely twelve, so that it was impossible that the coachman could have the horses put to at so early an hour.

Morant offered to go to the Mount-Common Arms and find the coachman, but his lordship politely but steadily refused the offer; and having seen his friend trip lightly up the stairs to rejoin the gay company in the ball-room, from whence the sound of music, mirth, and merriment proceeded in a joyous strain, he left the Town Hall, with his hat pulled over his brows, and his teeth clenched tightly together.

The night was dark as pitch; not a lunar ray or a stellar gleam irradiated what was the blackness of the tomb. Castle Hampton had not as yet arrived at the dignity of being lighted by gas, and the one long straggling street, which was its principal feature, was well nigh as gloomy and murky as it could be.

The Mount-Common Arms was about a quarter of a mile from the Town Hall; between the two buildings was a tobacconist's shop, which, owing to the festivities at that time going on, was kept open until a late hour.

Lord Mount-Common walked rapidly along this street, muffled in his cloak, and apparently being desirous of reaching the hostelry, at which his carriage was housed, without loss of time.

The church clock boomed and clanged out the hour of twelve.

It was midnight.

Like the knell of a man's last hope, sepulchral as the groans of the wicked on the day of doom, dismally thundered the iron tongue of the massive bell.

Boom! boom! boom!

* * * * *

Exactly at twelve o'clock Simon L'Estrange quitted the shop of the tobacconist above mentioned, into which he had entered to obtain a cigar, and to have a chat with the proprietor, with whom, when in the country, he was in the habit of dealing.

Five minutes afterwards—it might have been less—some footfalls sounded behind him, and a heavy body precipitated

itself upon him; he was borne violently to the ground, a knee fell upon his chest, and ten long, wiry fingers bent and wound themselves round his throat, where, in spite of his opposition, and resistance, they clung tenaciously.

Minutes multiplied themselves, but no help came.

Simon L'Estrange grew black in the face; his mouth opened and his swollen tongue lolled out. His eyes started from their sockets, and blood trickled slowly from his ears and nostrils.

Not for an instant did the assailant relax his death-like grip upon his victim's throat.

What the end of this fearful event would be it was impossible to doubt: strangulation and death were but a matter of time—of a few fleeting minutes.

As it chanced no one passed through the street, either up or down, for fully five minutes. Then footsteps were audible, coming from the direction of the Town Hall.

With one last awful pressure the murderer loosened the throat of Simon L'Estrange, and looking wildly about him, hastened away as fast as his legs could carry him.

When he left him the strong man was dead; Simon L'Estrange had ceased to exist. He had breathed his last, and Lord Mount-Common was rid of an enemy.

* * * * *

A little before the quarter past twelve Lord Mount-Common walked up the steps leading to the Mount-Common Arms, and entered the bar, where he was instantly recognized, and obsequiously waited upon by the landlord—a cheerful, good-natured Boniface, rosy and jocund. Fond of his beer was mine host, and fond of his wife too—excellent qualities, which in a publican go well together.

"You leave the ball early, my lord," exclaimed the landlord.

"Yes," was the reply.

"A very brilliant affair, I am told?" continued the garrulous host. "All the rank and fashion there; so at least they say. Brandy, did I understand your lordship—brandy?"

Lord Mount-Common took up a tumbler, and snatching the old-fashioned bottle which the landlord held in his hand, poured out a goodly quantity, which he drank raw, without so much as heaving a sigh or winking his eyes.

"Bless me!" said the landlord; "I couldn't have done that, was it ever so. I should have lost my breath, and——"

"Never mind what you would have done, sir. Go and order my carriage," cried Lord Mount-Common, testily.

"Carriage, my lord? Yes, my lord," replied the landlord, making a bow and his exit at the same time.

The coachman was found in the tap-room, singing a jovial song with a noisy chorus, and he was not at all pleased at being disturbed by the landlord, who gave him the unpleasant intelligence that his master had left the ball unexpectedly, and wanted his carriage directly. As there was no help for it, John put the best face possible upon the matter, and followed by two footmen, his fellow-servants, went to the stables and looked on while the grooms harnessed the horses.

Lord Mount-Common entered the carriage as soon as it drove up: he did not utter a word. This reticence was not remarkable, as he was not in the habit of at any time conversing with his servants. A quick drive of half an hour took him to his home; and after drinking some more brandy, he lighted a cigar and strolled on to the terrace which faced the sea.

The terrace was a noble esplanade, commanding a splendid view; but as the night was black and gloomy there was little to be seen. He continued to walk up and down the terrace until the cigar was consumed. Then he turned round, intending to re-enter the castle, when a loud noise, as of many footsteps and men talking together in an excited manner, fell upon his ears. Looking in the direction from whence it came, he saw by the gleam of several flaring torches, that a dozen or more men had invaded his privacy, and actually dared to seek him on the terrace.

First and foremost was his brother. Douglas Downshire's tall form was not easily mistakeable; and though Lord Mount-Common had turned very pale at first, and staggered rather than walked to meet the intruders, his brother's presence appeared to reassure him, and standing still, he waited to receive the visitors.

Amongst them were several faces that he knew, and some that he did not know. One tall man was particularly observable. This was Sydney Godolphin, who had married Simon L'Estrange's sister. By his side were two young men, the Liddles of Tavistock, cousins of Simon L'Estrange. Behind them was a hoary-headed old gentleman, tremulous with age, and patriarchial in his appearance. This was Herbert De Guesclin L'Estrange, the father of Simon.

Truly the L'Estrange interest was mustering strongly.

It was noticeable that one and all gazed sternly upon

Mount-Common, as if they had some grave charge to prefer against him. No one held out a hand or spoke a word of welcome.

Lord Mount-Common drew himself up proudly, but said, with an affable smile,—

“To what fortunate cause, gentlemen, am I indebted for the honour of this visit? It seems to me that your entry might have been less unceremonious. I see my brother, if I am not mistaken. Perhaps he will explain to me what at present is a mystery.”

Douglas Downshire opened his mouth, and was about to speak, when Sidney Godolphin interrupted him, saying, “No, no. It is for us to speak.”

“Say rather for me,” exclaimed Herbert De Guesclin L’Estrange, “for Simon was ~~my~~ son.”

As he uttered these words a heavy stillness fell around, and for the instant no one spoke.

The old man’s voice was loud and thrilling in its intonation.

His words were ominous of evil.

Lord Mount-Common did not appear to understand their import for a moment; but a horrible suspicion took possession of his mind.

“What—what do you say?” he cried. “Simon L’Estrange *was* your son?”

“I said so, for he has ceased to exist.”

“Great God!” ejaculated Mount-Common.

“Ceased to exist!” repeated the fiery and impetuous Sidney Godolphin, in scornful accents.

“That language may suit the lips of an old man, but it will not do for me. It is far too tame and commonplace. I say that Simon L’Estrange, my dear kinsman, has been foully murdered this night. Hear that, Mount-Common, and tremble as you hear it.”

“I hear you, sir,” replied Mount-Common; “but I do not see why I should tremble, or in what way the death of your kinsman affects me. I deplore his death, though I have no cause to love him or his memory. If you were at Castle Hampton a few hours ago you were doubtless a spectator of the furious onslaught made upon me——”

“Yes, yes; we know all that,” returned Sidney Godolphin; “and we do not attempt to justify an outrage which in point of fact was indefensible. Then you had our sympathy; now——”

"And what now?" asked Lord Mount-Common, with an elevation of the eyebrows.

"Now we regard you with suspicion."

"Indeed!"

Lord Mount-Common looked from one to the other in the greatest perplexity; at last, encountering his brother's fixed gaze, he interrogated him with a glance.

"Perhaps I had better at once say," he exclaimed, "that these gentlemen, who are for the most part friends and relations of Simon L'Estrange, have come here to intimate, that they consider they are in possession of circumstantial evidence which is sufficient to implicate you in the murder of L'Estrange. I need not tell you, brother, that I do not for a moment share those suspicions; but as they exist it is impossible to ignore them. There is no doubt that L'Estrange has been brutally murdered, for the marks of the fingers which strangled him are distinctly visible upon his throat. My advice to you is, submit to an inquiry, when your innocence will be proved and your character vindicated."

Lord Mount-Common did not hesitate a moment in replying to his brother's remarks,

"Gentlemen," he said, in a calm voice, which denoted self-possession, if nothing more, "I place myself in your hands. It is with the greatest pain that I have listened to the account of the death of Simon L'Estrange. The grave kills enmities, and I freely forgive him the wrong he did me. I am willing to go through any ordeal, or submit to any examination to which it is your pleasure to subject me. I will only take this opportunity of declaring that I am guiltless of your kinsman's blood, and that I know no more of the matter than an unborn child. I do not expect you to believe my asseverations, and I therefore repeat that I place myself in your hands."

Sidney Godolphin, the Liddles and De Guesclin L'Estrange conferred together for a short time. The result of their deliberation was that they would stay at the Castle that night, and guard Lord Mount-Common (whom they looked upon as their prisoner), and take him before the justices at Castle Hampton the next day.

To this decision his lordship bowed, saying, that whatever was agreeable to them would be so to himself.

They had spared him the indignity of bringing police officers with them, and he was thankful that they had done so. He invited the party into his drawing-rooms. The invitation was accepted by Sidney Godolphin and the Liddles, but the others returned to their carriages and went away.

Neither Lord Mount-Common nor his brother retired to rest that night, although they snatched an hour or two's sleep in a chair. The best part of the night was passed by them in close and earnest conversation. Douglas Downshire made his brother acquainted with the grounds of suspicion against him, which were of a dangerous character. The body of Simon L'Estrange was discovered before the animal heat had departed from the limbs, nor had *rigor mortis* set in. Morant stated that Mount-Common had hastily left the ball-room on hearing that L'Estrange had preceded him by a few seconds only, and as his lordship was known to be smarting beneath the injuries and insults he had received, it was concluded by the relations of the murdered man, that the latter had fallen a victim to the revengeful feelings of Lord Mount-Common.

The result of that conclusion has already been stated.

When the honourable Douglas Downshire had finished his recital, he said in earnest tones to his brother, "I must ask you one question. Do not be offended with me."

"Not I; ask a dozen, if you like," was the frank reply.

"My question is this. Were you, or were you not, directly or indirectly, the cause of Simon L'Estrange's death?"

"On my honour, I was not," answered Lord Mount-Common, in a voice that neither quivered nor shook in the least. "I knew no more of that man's death, until I heard it from De Guesclin, just now, than yonder senseless wall."

"Enough," cried Douglas, wringing his hand; "I believe you, and am satisfied."

"The matter will, I presume, be fully investigated to-morrow?"

"No doubt, the justices meet at ten. The charge against you will be gone into, and I have no doubt a remand will be ordered until the report of the coroner, consequent upon the inquisition, is presented. You will have no difficulty in finding substantial bail to any amount, and in a week you will be free from the slightest stigma, rid of an enemy, and able to resume your accustomed place in society.

"Of that I feel confident; but, my dear Douglas, it is very frightful to be openly accused of a terrible crime. I feel it deeply, and my courage at times seems oozing away when I recall it by the exercise of a vigorous effort. I must lean upon you for support. You must be my champion. Will you? May I rely upon your best exertions in my behalf?"

"That you may," replied Douglas Downshire, cheerily.

"Thanks. I will re-pay your kindness some day," said Lord Mount-Common, feelingly.

"Tut, tut!" cried Douglas; "a true man never wants any payment for doing his duty. This is your hour of trial. I believe you innocent, and I give you my support. If I thought you guilty I should still support you; but believing in your innocence, as I do, I support you with more alacrity and earnestness."

They then separated, and tried to snatch a few hours' sleep; but though they slept, their vigilant guards did not, for they had a duty to perform, and were determined to fulfil it.

* * * * *

At a distance of about three miles from Peacock Rise, was the Dane Wood; the trees were ancient, and of great growth; the wood was the resort of innumerable deer, and abounded in all sorts and descriptions of game, for Lord Mount-Common preserved strictly, and punished poaching with a severity that some would have thought reprehensible.

Nevertheless, he was robbed of his game, for the wood offered peculiar facilities for poaching, which several desperate characters took advantage of. It was full of mazy labyrinths, dense foliage, and intricate paths.

A man who had studied them could afford to laugh at the keepers, and set them at defiance.

It seems impossible to teach poor people that game is property: pheasants, hares, partridges, and the like, are to the poor and reckless poacher *feræ naturæ*, and as such he treats them. Although the land covered by the wood was rich and fertile, a large tract on its skirts was quite the reverse; nature appeared to have strained one part of all its goodness in order to give it to the other. The Common, as it was called, produced nothing better than stunted grass and rushes in great profusion—rushes always patronize poor, wet, and heavy clay soil. Cattle were turned out to graze upon the Common, but the sagacious animals always made furious attempts to get into the wood, where they knew a luxuriant undergrowth would repay them for their exertions.

The keepers, however, took care that no gaps should exist, and that every breach should be filled up as soon as made.

In the middle of this waste, but within sight of the wood, was a small cottage, which no one unacquainted with its resources would have taken as a beer-shop. It nevertheless had a license to sell beer, the said beer to be drunk on the premises. A board over the door informed the public that David Bates

was a licensed dealer in beer, tobacco, and snuff; and a large inscription above this notification further informed the public that the beer-shop in question was known as the Wanderer's Home.

Truly, none but wanderers, social outcasts, and pariahs, were at all likely to visit the "Home." Situated in a grim wilderness as it was, none but the feet of vagrants, and labourers having a job in the neighbourhood, visited it, if you except a stray keeper now and then having come down that way on business.

David Bates's brewer allowed him a profit of twelve shillings upon every eighteen gallon barrel that he sold. This was liberal; but Bates did not get rid of more than twelve barrels a year, summer and winter taken together. So he found it difficult to get a living.

He existed in hopes of bettering his condition some day; for learned people had visited the heavy clay soil, and after examining it, declared that there was coal far beneath the surface. If Lord Mount-Common could only have been induced by these scientific people to bore for coal, and if fortune had decreed that the black diamonds should be found, then would David Bates's star have been in the ascendant, for a small colony would have arisen as if by magic in the neighbourhood of the coal-pit; and instead of "doing" twelve barrels a-year, David would have done twelve barrels a-week.

Bates was a labourer by trade, and eked out his miserable income by doing a day's work whenever he had the chance. Half-a-crown a day was what he received for his services, and very often he was obliged to walk three or six miles to his work. This he looked upon as a great hardship; but being a man of good principles, he fought his way gallantly, and managed to feed and clothe his family.

His wife was a good religious woman. David was forty-five, his wife Emma was five years younger. She had been a servant for a few years before she met him. Being an orphan, the work-house had provided for her, brought her up, and sent her to service. David Bates married her when she was nineteen.

Her nature was naturally soft, yielding, and devotional; two children were the fruit of this union. The boy William was twenty, and his sister Fanny two years his junior, at the time of the county ball at Castle Hampton, at which date our story opens.

Fanny was a comely girl, and a good one. William was a tall, loutish, lazy fellow, who preferred skulking around the edges of

the Dane Wood with a stone in each hand—on the look out for hares and rabbits—instead of going to work with his father.

Every one who knew David Bates said that he was a hard-working, painstaking man, who did his best in a hard fight against adverse circumstances. If the Wanderer's Home had been a little more accessible, it is probable that the man might have made a better living.

Lord Mount-Common's steward had decided upon draining some portion of the Common, and some workmen were despatched to a particular spot to lay the pipes. The spot being near the Wanderers' Home, David Bates was employed, and liked the job.

One day he had been at work in heavy rain, which descended with great pertinacity. He was not absolutely obliged to work in the wet, but, if he had not worked, he would have discovered the loss of a day's wages on Saturday night; so, for the sake of his family, he set to work and did his best.

At six o'clock he returned home, and found no fire by which to dry his wet clothes. His wife said that William had been too idle to go to the wood and pick up sticks, but he had killed a rabbit with a stone, and, as Bates did not look upon that as a very grievous crime, the fact was a redeeming feature in his son's case.

Without a word Bates walked out of the cottage, and stalked through the rain and clayey mud to the wood, through which he pushed his way. The rain still continued to descend, and the heavy drops from the trees saturated him through and through.

Of course there was plenty of dead wood lying about, and Bates soon collected as much as the cord he had brought with him would encircle. Throwing it over his shoulder he returned home, and finding some dry pieces of wood in an outhouse, a fire by his indefatigable exertions was soon kindled.

It is said that the heat of the sun or the warmth of a fire will draw a viper from its hole. The fire certainly had the effect of drawing William Bates from his obscurity. He had been lying on his bed upstairs, reading a wonderful tale about vampires, which he had purchased of a travelling bookhawker; but smelling the fire, as it were, he left the vampires to look after themselves, and, with his hands in his pockets, entered the kitchen in which the family were congregated. Fanny, amiable and radiant, was doing all that lay in her power to assist her father, for whom she had a sincere regard. The fire was burning brightly, and beginning to emit considerable heat.

David Bates was in a better temper than when he came home, and went upstairs to change his clothes, which, as his wife graphically expressed it, were "wringing wet."

When he returned, attired in some dry but ragged garments, his eyes fell upon his son, who, to the exclusion of his mother and sister, had taken a chair, placed it in the middle of the hearth, and was enjoying the cheerful blaze.

David Bates seized him by the arm, and pushed him to one side, saying, angrily, "If you want to sit by fires you had better either get them ready, or work for your living."

"So I do," was the reply, "Haven't I killed a coney to-day. I'll lay a wager mother will be glad enough to put the pot on presently, and make a stew for supper. If you work one way, father, I work another, and if you don't like it, tell me so, and I'll go 'list for a soldier."

William was his mother's pet. An eldest or an only son always is; whereas, Fanny was her father's darling. David Bates would have done anything for Fanny.

"For the use you are to me you may go to-night," said Bates, who was annoyed by the weather, his disagreeable day's work, the idleness of his son, and the gnawing impatience of a hungry stomach.

"No, no, Davy," cried his wife. "Don't talk to the lad in that way. He's good enough. You will find it so bye-and-bye, though it may seem different just now. Make allowance for him."

"So I do, missis," responded David Bates; "I've been making allowance for some time now, but I don't see the use of it. I work hard enough, and can scarcely get a living as it is."

"Well, well, hold your tongue, do, while I go and get the rabbit ready. When you've had some supper you'll be better tempered."

David grumbled, but hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt as he did, he thought it best to hold his peace. William stood at the corner of the fireplace, waylaying the rays of heat as they darted out of the grate. Fanny went to the sink with her mother, and busied herself in assisting to prepare the savoury mess, which was to compensate David Bates for all the hardships of incessant toil and inclement weather.

Soon afterwards the rain ceased and the wind got up. It was curious to watch the wind as it careered over that Common. It tore along with a fury inconceivable, and threatened to tear up the grass even by the roots. Trees there were none nearer than the Dane Wood. The trees there protected one another,

because they were so close together as to be able to defy the fiercest storm that ever raged.

The coming of a storm always brought great disquiet to David Bates. Storms were his abhorrence, for he thought that his badly-constructed cottage would be utterly demolished and laid level with the plain.

Nor was this fear extravagant and without foundation. The cottage was badly put together, and shook every time the wind blew with more violence than usual. It had never gone so far as to rock to and fro, but the foundations had been severely tried, and the roof, more than once, had had the appearance of flitting to other, if not happier, regions.

"The wind's blowing, Bill," he said to his son.

"Very well, let it blow," was the undutiful reply.

"You won't say that, my boy, if so be it blows a hurricane," said David.

"What does it matter to me," surlily answered the cub.

"If you can't be a little civil to your own father, my lad, your father will do his best to teach you," cried David Bates, growing red in the face with anger. "You are not satisfied with being allowed to have your own way, and play about as you like, eating bread earned by other people; and, as I said before, if you haven't got better manners, I'll see if I can't do something to teach you."

"Teach me, then," said William, with a defiant gesture; "if you do——"

"What?"

"It'll be the first thing you ever did teach me."

"You say that again and——"

"Oh, David, David! Don't go for to make matters worse," exclaimed Emma, running up to him, and holding his clenched fist in her two soft palms, and rubbing it until the muscles relaxed, and the fingers were harmless once more.

"I don't want to make things worse, missis," cried David; "you can't say that of me. I'm always trying to make them better, but I can't sit here in my own house, and be insulted by an idle vagabond like that."

"If he is idle, Davy, he's your son," said Emma, reproachfully.

"Worse luck," muttered David, with a satirical laugh.

"Father's always grumbling about how hard he's got to work," cried William. "If he finds me such a burden to him, why don't he let me 'list; or, if he wants me to stay at home, I know a way of feeding me without much hard work."

"And what's that, Bill!" asked his mother, with some curiosity depicted upon her countenance.

"Ain't there plenty of fat bucks in Dane Wood?"

"That there be."

"Very well, then, what do you want to go without food for, or why does father want to go working in the wet and coming home in a bad temper to bully me? Ain't there pheasants, and partridges, and rabbits, and hares in the wood, besides the bucks? I wish you all had half my pluck."

"No, no," said David Bates; "that would be downright poaching. I don't care so much about knocking a rabbit on the head with a stone; but I won't get into a habit of poaching as long as I can lift my right hand, and do a stroke of honest work with it."

"That's right, Davy," said his wife. "I like to hear you speak like that, for be sure that God's blessing will never descend upon those who pick and steal. The game belongs to the gentlemen upon whose ground it lives."

"I don't know about that," said David. "If it is so, it's a hard thing. The law says so, and I suppose we must knock under to the law. It's an offence to take the game, but whether it's a sin or no, I won't say."

"A sin!" echoed William, contemptuously; "a sin to bag a few head of game! Well, I like that. Is there anything in the Bible,—and that's God's book,—about taking game. Look it through, and if you can tell me that there is, I'll never touch a coney no more."

"They say the game's theirs—that is, the landlords say so; and the law bears them out," remarked Fanny.

"I know they say so," replied William; "but the law is made by rich people to oppress the poor. If the poor had a voice in the making of the laws there'd be no game laws, I know. The birds fly, don't they?"

"Yes."

"And they feed themselves?"

"Yes, they do."

"Well, then, what more do you want? Why shouldn't I kill them as much as Lord Mount-Common or Mr. Simon L'Estrange?"

"The birds feed on *their* land, not on ours," said Fanny.

"Never mind. You know nothing about it. Go and look after the cooking. Father and me's talking, and it's nothing to do with you," said William, angrily.

Fanny walked away submissively enough. She always was

submissive, and meek, and humble. She put up with much violence from her brother, and was driven here and there by her mother, who would sometimes lose her temper, when the cares and worries inseparable from poverty weighed heavily upon her.

Fanny was handsome, tall, well-made, having a good figure, slender and symmetrical, with a wasp-like waist. She was dark as the night, with long, glossy black hair. Her features were regular, and had the girl been well-dressed, she would have passed muster among a bevy of court beauties.

All at once a terrible crash was heard.

Something had happened. What the catastrophe was, or what the extent of the mischief was, it was impossible to say. The noise continued. Mrs. Bates ran upstairs, followed by her husband.

William remained downstairs, standing carelessly by the fireplace.

A tremendous gust of wind blew the smoke down the chimney, and, filling the air, insinuated itself into the young man's lungs, making him cough woefully.

Fanny, timid, innocent and religious, fell upon her knees, regardless of the hard bricks, and began to pray.

Scarcely had the heartfelt prayer left her lips, when the tempest that was raging outside, and which had been hourly and momentarily increasing in violence, blew the window in, scattering the broken panes of glass in every direction, and creating the utmost havoc and mischief. The candle, of course, was extinguished.

The wind and the smoke met in violent conflict in the chimney, and roared horridly.

To add to the consternation of those below, shrieks descended from the floor above.

William, roused from his lethargy, ran up the crazy tottering staircase, and saw his father in the front bed-room, bending over the body of his wife.

The thatch had been removed from the roof in patches, and a huge rafter lay on the floor side by side with several smaller beams.

Emma Bates was evidently much injured.

William addressed his father, with difficulty making himself heard, owing to the violence of the storm, and asked if he could be of any assistance.

By the aid of father and son, Emma was conveyed to the kitchen and placed upon the bricks, anything that was handy being put under her.

The poor woman groaned heavily, and the blood trickled slowly from a wound in her head.

David Bates began to think that fortune was dealing hardly with him.

"William!" exclaimed the landlord of the Wanderer's Home.

"Yes, father."

"I'm sore afraid your mother's going to her rest. She be main bad."

"What is the matter? How did it happen?" inquired William.

Fanny had risen from her knees, and crept to her mother, doing all she could to stop the hæmorrhage, and bedewing her face with tears.

"This is how it happened, to my thinking, though I can't speak with certainty, because it was done before I arrived. I found your mother lying on her back, cut about dreadful, and a big beam was beside her. Most likely the beam caught her head as it fell, when she was entering the room. Anyhow, she's plaguy bad. Look 'ee here, Bill, be you man enough to go to Castle Hampton, and fetch the doctor?"

"Be I," said William; "in course I be. Mother's bad, and I'd go to the end of the world for mother. Fan, lass, give us my hat, and bit of a stick standing in the corner, and I'm off like a stone when I throw it."

"That's right. You're not so bad as I thought, Bill," said his father. "I think you want understanding. The luck's against us now, but if we get right again, and bring the missis—God bless her—round once more, I'll study you, Bill, more than I have done. If you can't do field work, perhaps you can do summut else. We can't talk now, though; time's pressing. You be off, and thank 'ee, for I could not go myself. I'm dead beat with my day's work, and couldn't tramp ten miles were it ever so."

"Good bye, father," said Bill. "I shan't be long gone, and you may swear I'll bring the Doc., if I have to lug him along by the hair of his head."

"Go to Mr. Parsons, Bill. He's got a 'orse and trap," said David Bates, "and give him this five-shilling piece. It's all I've got. Tell him he shall have some more on Saturday night, for I'll tramp over with half my wages. Mr. Parsons will drive you over, and there'll be a saving of time."

"Very well, father. I'm off," said William, who took his hat from his sister, placed it firmly on his head, and with the corners of his mouth drawn down in a way expressive of

determination, he sallied forth on his journey amidst the wind and rain.

The accident to Mrs. Bates had happened as her husband conjectured. When she entered the bed-room, she found that the best part of the roof had been blown off by the violence of the wind, and that the rafters were tottering.

Scarcely had she looked around her and noted all this, when a beam fell, striking her on the back of her head, and doing her a most grievous injury.

The rabbit was on the fire, and cooked to a turn, with onions and other appetizing things, but David Bates could not touch it. Fanny pointed to it, and mutely asked him whether she should dish it up. He answered in the negative by a shake of his head.

Two anxious hours elapsed before the Doctor came, and when he did, he made a minute examination of Mrs. Bates's injuries, and taking the husband aside, he informed him that the rafter which struck her had touched the brain; and, although he could heal the wound by skill and time, he would never be able to make her what she had been formerly.

"What do you mean?" cried David Bates, much astonished and bewildered. "I don't understand you."

"I mean that your wife, my poor fellow, will never again be a rational being. The rafter has injured her brain, and she will in future be an idiot."

"Oh Doctor, dear Doctor, you're not telling me true," said David, in a wheedling tone, as if he wished Mr. Parsons to admit that he had been telling a falsehood, and misrepresenting the case.

"What I have said is the truth; it is, indeed," replied the Doctor. "I am sorry for you. It is a great calamity, but as Heaven has ordained that it should be so, to murmur is useless. I have bound up the wound, and will drive over to-morrow with some medicine."

The medical man had pronounced the decree of fate, and David Bates bowed his head to the fury of the blast. He was condemned to have a wife and yet to have no wife. Emma in future would be a nonentity. She would preserve her appearance, but the lustre would fly from her eyes, the energy from her hands, and upon that subtle thing, the mind, a mysterious blight would fall—aye, had fallen already—for the brain was paralyzed, and the miserable woman was but the shade of a name.

Days passed by. The words of the Doctor were verified in

every respect. Dame Emma grew no better. She was a complete idiot. She knew no one. Occasionally, a glimpse of sanity would visit her forlorn mind, and she would catch up her boy's hand and kiss it lovingly, or she would look up affectionately in her husband's face.

This was all.

The effect of the storm was to cause her to lapse into hopeless idiocy.

The disaster which had befallen David Bates so preyed upon his mind that he was altogether unable to work. He would sit beside his wife for hours together, and talk to her, but, as a matter of course, he received no answer. She did not know him. When he spoke she turned up her dull eyes on him with a vacant stare, and sometimes laughed hysterically.

If William had not pursued his usual avocation, and killed some wild animal occasionally, starvation would have made its appearance in David Bates's cottage.

William was very fond of his mother, but he did not show his grief at the calamity which had befallen her, in the same way as did his father. He would go into the forest and sit down under a tree, and, unseen by any one, weep many a flood of tears; for the lad was sensitive; he had a heart which could feel for the misery of others, and more especially for that which afflicted those who were near and dear to him.

A fortnight elapsed.

The events which took place on the night of the storm completely transformed Bates, and made a different man of him. He lost the timid bearing and tame submissiveness which had formerly characterized him. When he had his wife's love and kindness to fall back upon, he was not afraid of hard work, nor did he care what happened. Want of work might cause him to wander about with an empty stomach. Customers might keep away from the Wanderer's Home until the beer went sour in the cellars, and various other little ills to which our miserable flesh is heir to might assail him, without causing him much annoyance.

Emma was always at hand to cheer him up and reassure him, but this invaluable stay and support was wrenched from him, and David became reckless and daring.

He would go with his son William to the skirts of the forest, and stone the coney or whatever game was rash enough to venture within his reach, and William noted that he more than once cast wistful eyes in the direction of a stag royal, moving with branching antlers over the green sward, and cropping the grass in peaceful security.

"Come, father, pluck up a spirit," said William; "we are all but starving. A fat buck would not be missed by Lord Warminster, and to us it would be salvation."

"Aye, lad, you speak the truth," replied David Bates, moodily.

"Well, then, who or what's to hinder us from killing a deer?"

"It's poaching."

"Of course; but what of that. I know the law's severe, but the law will have to catch us before it hurts us. I'm not afraid, if you are. What's a few years in prison, after all. May I be shot if I wouldn't almost as soon be in a prison as live any longer on this dreary common. I'm sick and tired of it. If I don't have some little excitement to 'liven me up, I shall go to market town, and 'list for a soldier."

"Reach me down that old gentleman," said Bates, pointing to a rusty firelock which hung over the mantel-piece. "It is a long time since I had that gentleman in my hand. It was made by a good maker, and I mind me that I gave as much as three pun ten to Sketchley, the keeper, who had taken it in a poaching fray from some of the Castle Hampton men. Reach it down, lad, I'm curious to have a look at it."

William needed no second bidding. He jumped upon a chair, and reached down the gun, which was in anything but good condition, being covered with dust and little specks of rust, which appeared to be doing their best to eat into the hard iron, and ruin what was once a serviceable weapon.

Bates received the gun from William, and handled it with the air and manner of one accustomed to deal with lethal weapons. He gave it a shake, to free it from the dust, and then placed it against his shoulder, as if about to fire, eased the lock, looked down the muzzle, and then with some difficulty turned it round and round, until he had unscrewed some joints. It was truly a poacher's gun, for it divided into three pieces, which would go in the pocket; the stock was very small.

"That is famous, father," exclaimed William, rubbing his hands; "wouldn't I have had that down and made use of it before now, if I had known that it took to pieces, and was so handy as it is."

"Go to the cupboard and see whether there be any sweet oil," said Bates; "I'll try and clean it. I may as well pass the time one way as another; bring me a bit of a rag at the same time."

David had listened to the voice of the tempter; and during

the remainder of that day he devoted the whole of his time to burnishing and brightening his gun; until he succeeded in bringing it to a high state of polish and efficiency, he did not desist from his efforts.

The next day he sent William over to Castle Hampton to buy some powder and shot, together with a box of caps. This looked like business. Fanny had been suspicious, but she did not say anything until William imprudently remarked, as he threw the ammunition down upon the table, "This will lay low the finest stag in the Dane Wood, or I am much mistaken."

"Oh! father. What are you about to do?" cried Fanny, in an agony of fear.

"What is he going to do!" replied William, speaking for his parent; "why he's going to kill a deer, if he only has luck enough to come across one when no keepers are near."

"To poach?"

"Yes. If you like to call it poaching, you may, though for my part I don't care about giving things their right names."

"That is dreadful," said Fanny, whose heart began to beat quickly.

"Why is it?" asked William, loudly. "Are the poor to starve because the rich have everything. Look at the sight of game my lord has in Dane Wood. It would feed the whole country side for years, and he wouldn't miss what the poor people eat. Don't tell me. Where's the harm? That's what I want to know!"

"But suppose, dear William, you were caught by the keepers, how shocking that would be."

"They've got to catch us first," said William, with a defiant laugh.

"Yes; the lad's right," remarked David Bates, in a reckless tone; "a tat buck would be a god-send to us. I begin to see things in a different light. I'm tired of working my life out. I've broken my back over work long enough now, and I'm sick of it. Now I mean to live like a gentleman, take my ease, live well, and serve the customers."

"When they come," said William, sarcastically.

"Right, lad; it's poor custom we get. How much hast drawn since Sunday, Fan?"

"But four pots, father; and two were for Sandy Mosely, who said he knew you'd trust him to pay next time he came this way," replied Fanny.

"But four pots! Just one gallon since Sunday; and to-

morrow's Saturday. There's custom for you ; and half of that not paid for. A fine living there is to be got out of that ; and yet the rich, who make the laws, expect us to be honest on such incomings."

"You and William can work, father ; and surely that is better than——"

"Peace, girl," cried David, sternly.

"No, no. I will speak. I feel that I shall have to reproach myself hereafter if I do not give vent to what is in my mind," said Fanny, boldly. "If you are weak enough to listen to William's arguments, father, ruin and disgrace are sure to follow. For Heaven's sake be advised by me ; abandon this project, and continue honest, I implore you."

"We can't starve," said William, surlily.

"No ; of course not. But as long as you and father have strength, we are in no danger of starving. Be a man, William, be brave, and——"

"Hold your noise," exclaimed William ; "women don't understand men's business."

Fanny was exhausted by her efforts, and she sat down upon a chair, covering her face with her hands, and weeping bitterly. Emma Bates was sitting upon a piece of matting in a corner, counting her fingers in a monotonous manner. This was her everlasting occupation : she would begin with the right hand, and go on with the left, saying, "One, two, three," and so on, up to ten, in a dreary manner. Sometimes she would make a break before coming to the end, being unable to remember the name of the figure, then she would begin again.

Nothing interested her much. The family became habituated to the melancholy silence ; and she might have been dead for all the notice they took of her. Fanny certainly paid her some attention, but it was very unpleasant and heart-breaking to encounter the fixed stare of those vacant eyes ; to draw forth no sign of recognition from the huddled-up body ; to listen to the childish enumeration of her ten fingers, or to see a hand raised to her head with a sharp cry of pain. The poor creature was happy enough in her ever-quiet idiotic way, so they left her to herself.

David Bates paid no more attention to his daughter, but loaded his gun and filled his powder and shot flask, conversing meanwhile in a low tone with William.

After dark they sallied forth, David Bates saying, "Keep up, Fanny, and let us in at the first knock."

She made no reply, but turned as white as marble, for she dreaded lest they should come to harm.

* * * * *

The Earl of Mount-Common was tried by a jury of his countrymen, upon the capital crime of murder, and acquitted.

Instead of receiving this verdict with joy and gladness, as most expected, he did not say a word. He persisted in stating his innocence, and when spoken to declared that the jury had but done their duty. The evening upon which Bates and his son started on their poaching expedition was part of the four-and-twenty hours in the early part of which the foreman of the jury had declared the noble prisoner at the bar not guilty. His lordship went home, and shortly afterwards left his friends, and went for a long walk. He was last seen entering Dane Wood.

These remarks are necessary for the proper elucidation of the story.

Very silently and quickly did David Bates and his son enter the pheasant preserves. They had not gone far before they heard a voice: a man was talking either to himself or to some companion.

"Hush!" whispered David, laying his hand on his son's shoulder.

Listening intently, Bates heard a voice, which he recognized instantly as Lord Mount-Common's, exclaim, "Here, in this solitude, I can own it. Here, where I am not surrounded by my fellow creatures, I can ease my conscience by confessing that I am a murderer. The jury acquitted me, but my soul will never be acquitted by a higher Power. I am the murderer of L'Estrange. It does me good to say it; a weight seems to roll off my shoulders as I say it. Hear me, oh! ye trees. I am the murderer of L'Estrange; 'twas this right hand which struck him down, and did the deed. I, Earl Mount-Common, say it."

He finished speaking, and deep groans were heard. "Dost hear that, lad?" said David to his son.

"Ay, father. It makes me shake. How he goes on."

Without a moment's hesitation David Bates went up to Lord Mount-Common, and said, "It was only the trees that heard you speak, my lord. I am in possession of your secret."

"What, and who are you?" cried Mount-Common, starting up.

"David Bates, the poacher, my lord, but as good as a mur-

derer any day ; and if you don't give me some money and any thing else I may want, I'll make you swing as high as——”

He did not complete his sentence, for Lord Mount-Common darted off amongst the brushwood, and was soon lost to sight ; and although David Bates pursued him, he could not find any trace of him.

That night Lord Mount-Common, in terrible alarm, left the castle, and went no one knew whither, and was not heard of again for some time. Two years passed over his head, during which time David Bates left the vicinity of the Dane Wood, and took an engagement on the line as pointsman.

There was a collision one night between a goods and a passenger train, and when David Bates went to the scene of the catastrophe, which was not far off his station, he saw among the dead the mutilated body of the engine-driver ; and who do you think that man was, gentlemen ? why no other than my Lord Mount-Common.

“How do you know that ?” asked Dawkins.

“Because,” answered Princaps, “*I am David Bates, the poacher.*”

There was a profound silence ; after which Princaps gave an explanation of the circumstances which led to his change of life and name. He became such a determined poacher that he had no peace of his life. His daughter married and left him, His son, less fortunate than himself, was caught in the act of netting pheasants, and transported ; and his idiotic wife died. There was no future before him, so he left the Wanderer's Home, and went, like many before him, “on the line”

VI. THE PLATELAYER'S MISTAKE.

THIS story was related by a venerable servant of the company who, having been born in the neighbourhood where the accident occurred, was well acquainted with all the local celebrities, and the gossip which was retailed in minor circles respecting them. As the pensioners knew him to be a garrulous old man, they prepared themselves for a long yarn, rather more prosy than interesting, but were agreeably disappointed in finding the narrative lively, and the climax thrilling, if not exciting.

The Craig, as it was called by country people in the neighbourhood, was a lofty hill, covered with trees of various descriptions. It was by no means a monarch of mountains, nor had it the slightest pretension to be called a mountain, even in the puny English interpretation of the word. It was simply a hill of a decent size, nicely wooded, and primitive on its surface ridges or *plateaux*, over which rabbits scampered on the approach of a footstep. At its foot nestled a handsomely built house of large dimensions, supplemented with all those domestic offices and accessories peculiar to big country houses. There were kitchen gardens, and houses for forcing grapes and mushrooms, a brewhouse, a laundry, a piggery, stables, kennels, and fowl houses. The mansion, as it deserves to be called, took its name from the craig, and, from its contiguity to the post town, was known as Lisdale Crag. The owner of this very pretty place was also lord of the soil for many miles around, consequently, it may be presumed that he was a man of great will, nor would the presumption be erroneous. His expenditure was on an extravagant scale, but he was always desirous of living up to his income, although he never exceeded it. He patronized all the pursuits in vogue in the country, and was seldom absent at a "meet." His name was Norman Balfour. He was known to few out of the immediate circle of his acquaintance, as he had never in his life been ambitious of political honours, or of obtaining the applause of his fellow men, or the favour of the fickle multitude. He associated himself with the annual races at Lisdale to the extent of giving five hundred pounds to be run for. This donation was known as the Balfour Stakes, and the Editor of the "Lisdale Gazette and County Chronicle," put forth that Mr. Balfour was a munificent patron of the turf. The gentleman, in return, wrote a letter to the Editor, stating that he did not care two straws for the turf, or for those who picked up a precarious and questionable living by betting on events set down in the Racing Calendar. His only object in encouraging the so-called national pastime was to improve the breed of horses. So the Editor inserted the letter, and feeling sorry that he had spoken, abased himself before the independent owner of Lisdale Crag, who, in order to shew that he had no wish to court rustic literature, ordered a hundred copies of the Gazette, with which he papered the walls of a new harness room.

Mr. Balfour had an only son, whose mother had been long dead; he was five-and-twenty years of age, and did very much as he liked. His allowance from his father was as ample as he

could have wished, had not dissipation set its mark upon him. He passed the best part of his time in the society of congenial minds, was an indefatigable turfite, occasionally honouring his father with a visit, and in the hunting season rode well after the hounds. He had been in a cavalry regiment, but wearying of the discipline, he sold his commission, and was now as idle as he could wish.

Mr. Balfour did not attempt to check his son in the indulgence of his pernicious habits; he had been a little wild himself in his youth. He reasoned that, if a certain sort of fire is in a man's composition, it is better to let it rage and burn itself out;—by throwing wet blankets upon it and checking it, the only result you obtain is a dangerous smouldering, which may at any time be fanned into a flame.

One day Mr. Norman Balfour was standing on the steps in the front of his house, smoking a cigar, and looking over the wide expanse of meadow land which went to form his park; behind him rose the frowning mass of earth and chalk, which made up the sum total of the Crag. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, in the month of October; the sun had risen with a brilliancy unusual at that time of the year, and by its power the mist had become evaporated and absorbed in masses of ether less dense than themselves. The trees were already partially despoiled of their leaves, and those which had to follow hung by an unstable tenure, which the first gust of wind, preceded by a sharp frost, would sever. The tints of the leaves which remained were as varied as they were beautiful. Mr. Balfour's attention was abstracted from the contemplation of the landscape, which was not without its charms for a lover of nature, by hearing the sound of a heavy footstep grating over the gravel. His quick eye recognized the form and features of his steward, Paul Kirby.

Paul was a man past fifty, he had been in the service of the Balfours all his life, in some capacity or other, and he had the greatest respect for them. If he spoke to any body of the ancestral domain, of which he had the management and the care, he knew that he was not talking of a mushroom creation. It is not my intention to state whether or not the Balfours came over with any conqueror, or whether they had possessed the land before such conqueror arrived, for I never took the trouble to enquire; but as far as those living on the estate knew, Lisdale Crag had always belonged to the Balfours. Kirby regretted extremely that his young master, as he was in the habit of designating him, should have chosen to go to the

bad instead of pursuing the narrower road which leads to that which is good ; but he was too well trained to make any such remark, either to Mr. Balfour or his son.

"Give you a good morning, Kirby," exclaimed Mr. Balfour, "Do you want to see me, because, if you do, I should like you to say what you have to say as quickly as possible. I ride to the Home farm to-day to see a steam ploughing match. One of our fellows ploughs against one of Howard's Champions."

"Yes, sir, I shall be there myself? It is young Baldoek of the Dale ; he is strong and lusty, he looks well put together, and in my humble opinion he has some chance of winning."

"I hope he may," returned Mr. Balfour ; "nothing gives me greater pleasure than to see laborious, painstaking young men successful in those affairs in which they embark heart and soul. Well," he added abruptly "what's your business, Kirby?"

"Just a little matter of money, sir," replied Paul Kirby, "Mr. Norman has written to me from London, saying he wants a couple of thousand pounds, and desiring me to send him a draft for that amount without delay. Now, in a matter of that sort I do not feel at liberty to act independently. You have at all times given me the greatest latitude ; but two thousand is a large sum, and one I should not feel justified in parting with, unless I had your express and direct sanction and permission."

"Very right, Kirby, very right indeed," replied Mr Balfour, musingly.

"He seemed to be making a calculation in his mind as to the sums his profligate son had received from him during the year. Your country squire, taken as a rule, is not much of a hand at mathematics ; he blunders at vulgar fractions, and is utterly at sea as regards decimals—not because he has never been taught, but because his mind has always been filled with other and more engaging subjects, and he has omitted to take the trouble necessary to retain his learning in his mental storehouse.

"He must have it if he wants it, I suppose," Mr. Balfour said at last. "He has drawn rather heavily on me this year, but he'll pull up after Christmas. Take my word for it, Kirby, he'll pull up."

"Hope he may, sir, I'm sure," said Kirby, "it's been the prayer of my heart this ever so long."

"Now what's the use of talking like that, my good fellow," cried the squire lustily. "I have plenty of money, and if it is necessary for his enjoyment that he should spend a portion of

it, let him do it; he is my flesh and blood, and money was made to be spent; those who hoard it do an injury to the State."

"I am rather short of money just now, sir," exclaimed Paul Kirby, "we have to make good the damage done by the storm to the out-buildings at the Willow Tree Farm. There is the granary by the side of the brook blown down, and many other barns and sheds injured. By the terms of the lease the landlord is bound to repair."

"Well, what are you driving at?" enquired Mr. Balfour, lighting a fresh cigar.

"Just this, sir. If Mr. Norman takes all my ready money, I shall have to cut down some of the timber in the close on the west side of Lisdale Wood."

"H'm, that's bad," muttered Mr. Balfour, "can't you avoid that?"

"Don't see how I can, sir, unless you sell that forty acre lot to Lady Byrom, who has been anxious to buy it for some time past, as it adjoins her ladyship's estate."

"She shall never have a wood of it," cried Mr. Balfour, angrily, "do you mind me, not a wood. Cut the timber down if you can do nothing else. Tenants never object to the felling of timber."

"Very well, sir, it shall be done," replied Paul Kirby, touching his hat, and, in Court Circular parlance, leaving the presence.

Mr. Balfour turned on his heel, and entered the house, saying to himself, "That boy spends a deal of money; what he does with it I can't imagine. If he don't pull up soon, I must stop the supplies. I must, by Jove. That will bring him to his senses."

Young Balfour's greatest friend was Sir Beddoes Brady, whose reputation was not the most odorous in the world. He had acquired an unenviable notoriety amongst those who knew him, and amongst large numbers of people who were merely acquainted with his name and antecedents. He was lax in the matter of morality, and he had a very strong objection to paying his debts; perhaps he was of Pistol's opinion, when the ancient declared that the slave who paid was base. Although his creditors were men of average ability and acumen, the utmost they could strain from their debtor in the shape of a legal tender was "Something on account," which is something and nothing. It is something because it holds out a hope that the debtor is not thoroughly dishonest and ambitious of the dis-

tinguishing honours of bankruptcy; and it is nothing, because it is so very unsatisfactory when a final liquidation of the sum total has been expected. Sir Beddoes Brady was a very bad companion for Norman Balfour; he could with difficulty have found a worse. He indoctrinated the young commoner's mind with all sorts of tastes and fancies, which in the end were destined to prove disastrous in their results. A man who is thoroughly idle must do something. I do not mean this as an addition to the budget of paradoxes. My meaning is simply that a man who has no occupation worthy of his time and talents, will addict himself to pursuits which are certain to end in moral degradation, and calculated, by their intrinsic worthlessness, to lower the tone of a man's mind by the bare contemplation of them.

Young Balfour avoided all the ways of passing time profitably and honourably, in order that he might indulge those which were unworthy of his notice. The natural consequence was that he drew heavily upon his father; lavished money as if it were so much water, and evinced an eagerness to ruin himself, which was little short of infatuation. He did all he could to achieve that undesirable consummation; and, to do Sir Beddoes Brady justice, he helped him all he could. Sir Beddoes was no inconsiderable gainer by the folly of his friend. If he wanted money for any pressing emergency, he knew he could always obtain it from Balfour. If he wished to back a horse which he was told by friends of the stable was sure to win, he knew that Balfour would bet against it, if no one else would. If he wanted to sell a horse for which he could not in the market have obtained more than a hundred sovereigns, he was tolerably certain that Balfour would give him double that sum for it: so Sir Beddoes cultivated Balfour and humoured him to the top of his bent. It was for the Baronet that Norman had written to his father's steward for two thousand pounds; Heaven knows I do not say this in mitigation of Balfour's silliness and stupidity. The fact is merely related to show that the heir-at-law to Lisdale Crag was not selfish in his ruinous amusements, and was ready to oblige a friend when the occasion rose for the obligation to be incurred.

A long-suffering tailor, who had given the Baronet credit for I don't know how long, saw how intimate the two gentlemen were, and by dint of payment and trivial bribes to the lacquey of Mr. Balfour, he derived information which caused him to sign judgment in an action he had brought against Sir Beddoes. He argued that Mr. Balfour would never see his friend dragged

to prison for a debt of a paltry nature, and that by taking harsh measures he should get his money. The machinery of the law, crushing and grinding as it is, was put in motion, and the Baronet, who was neither Honourable nor Right Honourable, was accosted in a fashionable thoroughfare, by two ill-looking fellows who were no better than bailiffs. He denied his individuality, and declared it to be a case of mistaken identity; but his denials were futile, and his declarations were vain. Sir Beddoes was confined in a sponging-house, where he had occasionally sojourned in days of yore, and made an application to his friend Norman, who procured him the money, though he did not know at the time that his father was felling his timber to supply his extravagancies. Had he been aware of the fact, it would only have cost him a temporary pang. He was to some extent hardened, although not as yet utterly callous. There were good points in his character, and there were many bad ones. The latter were those of adoption, rather than inherent in his composition. Who can go through the fire without being scorched or scathed? Who can touch pitch without being defiled? He would have shared his last shilling with a poor man, and his heart was ever open to the appeals of the indigent. He was not particular about a few shillings, more or less, in a bill, nor did he blame his servants for robbing him in the shape of perquisites, which sometimes, when realised, amounted to a very large sum in ready money. The Petticoat Lane Jews are not very particular what they take in the way of barter or exchange; and if a ring or a diamond pin is accidentally thrown into a promiscuous heap of things, they will allow something for it without pretending to notice its presence. In the case of a beggar he would toss his eleemosynary shilling into the extended hat without thinking that he was encouraging sin and vagabondage; for he said in a careless way, "I don't want the money, and that poor fellow does. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that he is an impostor. What then? The gift makes him comfortable, and does me no harm. Is it a sin to make a fellow-creature, lower than myself in the social scale, happy?"

Perhaps in these days of Union and casual wards, and parochial relief, this was a mistaken idea of benevolence, but it was his Poor Law, and he adhered to it.

Balfour had told Sir Beddoes Brady that he would write for the money he required, and let him have it on a certain day. If he had been able to write a cheque for the amount, he would have done so. On the day appointed the money was brought

by Balfour to the imprisoned Baronet, who speedily settled the demand against him, and went back to his house in his friend's phaeton. Sir Beddoes Brady did not give way to any extravagant expressions of gratitude; he politely said that he was much obliged to his friend for his timely assistance. He did not thank him in a hearty and genuine manner, and tell him that he hoped to have an opportunity some day of returning his kindness. He took the loan, or, more strictly speaking, the gift, as a matter of course, which just deserved an acknowledgment, and nothing more,—a verbal acknowledgment, of course, and not a written one, as that would have made him legally, instead of morally and honourably, the debtor of Norman Balfour. Sir Beddoes never put his hand to paper oftener than he could help. He knew the danger of it; he had, in the spring of his ignorance, suffered from so doing, and, like a burnt child who dreads the fire, he was as much afraid of pen and ink and paper, in a matter of name-signing, as a certain fallen archangel is said to be of holy water on any occasion.

Although a bachelor, the Baronet had a house of his own in Brook Street, not one of those princely mansions that may be discovered at every step in the neighbourhood, but a quiet, unobtrusive looking house, of genteel appearance and lilliputian dimensions; just big enough for a man without any family, and that was all. It was exquisitely furnished; the art of the upholsterer had not been exerted in vain in its decoration. Sir Beddoes was fastidious in the matter of colour, and his fancy was for having everything green and gold; the paper on the walls was green and gold; the carpets were green and fiery looking; the curtains were green, bordered with gold; and so on throughout the house. He had a smoking room, and a billiard room, and a bath room; a bed room for himself, and one for a friend; a sitting room, dining, breakfast, and drawing rooms.

"Will you drive me home?" exclaimed Sir Beddoes Brady, "I think I would rather go straight to my house. If I show anywhere, it will seem odd, for I told my man to say I was out of town for a few days. We can smoke a cigar, have an early dinner, and play a game at *écartè*. What do you say?" "I shall be very glad," replied Norman Balfour. "I have been quite lost without you; when it gets late we can look in at the Marquise *Havre de Grace's*, where we are sure of cards and high play."

They drew up to Sir Beddoes' house in Brook Street. The smoking room was the perfection of comfort. There were no

chairs or sofas, but piles of cushions ran all round the apartment, which was of moderate size; these were soft and luxurious.

A boy, as black as ebony, attended upon the smokers. This Ethiopian lad was a source of great pride and delight to Sir Beddoes Brady; he was never tired of relating how he came into his possession; he did not, of course, buy him as a slave, for the rights of a slave-owner are not recognized in a land from whence the glorious blessing of emancipation was originated, and sent on its triumphant progress through the world of serfdom. But having expressed a desire to inspect the dwellings, and see the manners and customs of the wild tribes of East London, he was going the rounds under guidance of a police-sergeant, when he saw, in a quiet back street, a man knock a boy down, and subsequently jump upon him. This brutal exhibition was not witnessed by Sir Beddoes without a very natural boiling of the blood, and borrowing the constable's staff, he laid it about the head of the cowardly ruffian until he was glad to run away and leave the victim of his barbarous cruelty half dead and seriously injured. The care of a skilful and experienced surgeon eventually brought the boy round, who said that he had shipped on board an English barque, as he wished to see the world, but, from the time of his leaving his own country, until his arrival in the mouth of the Thames, he had been subject to the most shameful ill-treatment. Thinking that a black servant would be a novelty, of which he might justly be proud, Sir Beddoes took him into his service, and found him a willing and obedient lad, although he was fond of salad oil, and rejoiced in an unctuous cutaneous appearance.

As Sir Beddoes Brady lay at full length on his oriental divan, reading the evening paper and smoking the pipe of peace, he could not help looking upon the ingenuous countenance of his young friend, who was similarly employed; and as he looked, he thought that the happy proprietor of the fabulous Golden Goose could not have been more fortunate than himself. Eggs of value were always ready to his hand, and there seemed no present prospect of the source of the auriferous deposit being dried up. He blew the tobacco gaily up to the ceiling, and, as it wreathed itself and formed into fantastic and curiously shaped rings, he fancied he was gazing upon sovereigns poised in mid air and floating high above him.

Although the proprietor of Lisdale Crag was rich and prosperous, he was not exempt from those petty miseries with which nearly all mortals are affected. For instance, he had a touch of the gout now and then, and in wet weather neuralgic

pains racked his temples and informed him of what excruciating materials *tic doloieux* is composed. He was worried occasionally, as we know, by money matters, but one of the greatest sources of discomfort to him arose from the ties of kindred. To sum up his miseries in a few words, he was troubled by poor relations. It was not his fault that they were poor, he had not made them inferior to himself in the matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. They were born poor and he was born rich, that was the principal difference between them. Poverty was the great gulf betwixt the Sandfords and himself, which the former were always trying to bridge over in some way or other.

Philip Sandford was a man of no particular birth or standing, but he had contrived to ingratiate himself with Miss Agatha Balfour, the aunt of the owner of the Crag. They were married, and as he quickly spent the money she brought him, the ban of the family was upon him, and he was forthwith excommunicated. Mr. Balfour, Agatha's brother, died, and his son succeeded to the property. His nephew did not treat his erring aunt so relentlessly as his father had done; he gave her an invitation to the Crag once in four years, but he would not hear of her bringing her husband with her. Mr. Sandford's sense of feeling was happily blunted. It resembled the hide of the rhinoceros, which is famed for its toughness, and he consoled himself for the deprivation to which he was subjected, by saying, "I am sure I don't care about going to his place. I hate and detest state dinners, where you are afraid to eat anything, and where beer is considered an abomination. It would have been more civil of him to have asked all his relations, but as long as Aggy wheedles a cheque out of him to get us over the winter, it's all the same to me."

By this sage, philosophic, and profound remark, it will be perceived that Mr. Sandford was a man who would not resent a blow, provided it was administered with a golden stick.

In course of time his children grew up around him, two girls and two boys; much to his wife's disgust, he christened the girls Jane and Mary Ann, names which she said were so homely, as to be unutterably vulgar. The eldest boy was called John William, but when the second was christened Mrs. Sandford asserted her independence, and insisted upon his being named Regulus. When the child began to dip into the mysteries of Roman history, he trembled, and wondered whether he, like his illustrious namesake, was destined to have his eyelids cut off by barbarous Carthaginians. Thinking that he would

feel uncomfortable without these useful appendages, he resolved that he would, neither directly or indirectly, inaugurate anything resembling a further punic war, and so incur the resentment of implacable enemies.

John William was the eldest, and consequently the hope of the family. Early in life he imbibed a fondness for the stage, and, at the age of sixteen, he made his *debut* at a minor theatre in the great Metropolis, in a transpontine suburb of which his father lived. Mr. Sandford was an indifferent artist. He had neither application nor talent sufficient to raise him in his profession. He was, in the fullest sense of the word, a man of mediocre ability. For days together he would never take the brush or the palette in his hand, and he would avoid both his studio and his easel. What he might have done, had he applied himself sedulously during his youth, when both the mind and the hand are plastic, it is difficult to say; but the bent of his inclination led him to the ale house, and there, amongst men fashioned infinitely below him in the intellectual scale, he wasted the precious moments which might have been turned to such good account. Had he been in a superior position, the result would have been, in a manner, the same, only instead of frequenting taverns he would have been an inveterate clubbiter. So the golden opportunity passed; his talent, if he had any, remained buried in his brain, just as the gold in the ground remains until it is dug up by enterprising spirits, and made subservient to the wants of man.

His son John partook of his father's devil-may-care, listless disposition. The theatre offered him a field which he embraced with rapture. By acting he made a few pounds, and was, to a certain extent, independent of his father, who never liked to part with any money he made by his fitful exertions. A picture dealer, perhaps, gave Mr. Sandford a ten pound note for an indifferently executed copy; while that lasted, the artist refused to do a stroke of work. It was therefore his wish to make it last as long as he could. Not until the wolf was actually howling at the door would he again exert himself.

Regulus was a boy of very little mind; he accompanied his brother to the theatre, and assisted the workmen to the best of his ability; he was thoroughly at home in the wings, and knew the meaning of flies, flats, flouts, skyboards, traps, and counterweights.

Mrs. Sandford had little or no control over her boys. The girls were her especial province, and although they were neither clever nor pretty, they were both good and hard-working; by

no means negative advantages. They took in needlework and did embroidery, and one had a sweetheart in the person of a friend of her brother John William. He was an actor at the Royal Albert Theatre. His name was Peter Cushman, and he was a walking gentleman at the Royal Albert. To Mary Ann he was known as Peter, but to an admiring public he was Cardigan Russell. He had taken up acting as a profession in an ill-advised moment, for he was not sufficiently clever to achieve success upon the stage. He was the only son of a chemist, and did not like pill rolling or mortar grinding. The pestle was his abomination, and the concoction of nauseous medicines made him ill, so he embraced a vocation more to his mind, but sadly unprofitable.

Jane was prim and stately; everybody said she would die an old maid; her fondness for cats gave a sort of pungency to this belief, rather repulsive to the juvenile mind, and her brothers invariably tormented her when she was discovered petting one of those fur-covered domestic animals. At first she was driven to the verge of madness, but after a time she too began to think she should die single, and settled down into a condition of dreamy apathy, most unhealthy for a girl of six-and-twenty. No woman should despair of getting a husband until she is close upon forty, and if she be well endowed, why, there are hopes for her during the ensuing decade.

Mrs. Sandford begged permission to take her two sons with her to Lisdale Crag, and wrote Mr. Balfour a supplicating letter, couched in the following words:—

“My dear Nephew,—I regret extremely to say that my unfortunate husband continues as idle as ever. I fear there is little chance *now* of reclaiming him, and pointing out the error of his ways. What might have been done in former times is so painful a theme upon which to speculate, that I willingly leave it with this brief allusion. My children are growing up. The boys are running wild, and fancy they have a turn or a genius for the stage, which their infatuated father cherishes and fosters in his usual thoughtless manner. I should feel inestimably thankful if some kind friend would remove them for a short time from the scene of their folly, and talk to them in a sensible manner, which, I would pray Heaven, they might estimate at its real value. Would you, dear Norman, mind their accompanying me on my usual visit to Lisdale, or if two would overwhelm you, pray give me permission to bring one. Philip has just finished a fine picture of the Scripture incident of Herodias. John the Baptist’s head on a charger

seems to me an admirable creation. Would you like it to your gallery? Philip estimates its value at fifty guineas—a dealer had offered him fifteen, and would not give a penny more; this sum would only pay him for paint and canvas, and not for his time, which has been solely devoted to this work of art for two months past.” (Mrs. Sandford’s estimate of the value of paint and canvas was a slightly exaggerated one.) “If I do not hear from you to the contrary by return of post, the picture will be sent to Lisdale by rail. Please let me know whether the boys may come.—Your ever affectionate aunt,
“AGATHA SANDFORD.”

These letters always put Mr. Balfour in an ungovernable passion; he did not like the Sandfords, he did not like his aunt; but the idea of having the boys on a visit to him at the Crag, was rather more than he could tolerate. He intended to write back an indignant negative, but the matter slipped his memory, which was refreshed by the arrival of the work of art. The case was unpacked, and the picture hung in a good light, which enabled Mr. Balfour to see that Herodias was a dowdy woman, attired in the costume of the period, and that the Baptist’s head in the charger was the most ghastly conception that ever germinated in human brain; while the king and his courtiers were so execrably painted as to resemble a crowd of negro melodists grouped together on a small stage. With an exclamation of disgust, he ordered it to be packed up and sent back again, still omitting to write to the Sandfords respecting the visit they proposed honouring him with.

Mrs. Sandford took his silence for consent, and determined to take her sons with her. She even went so far as to go to a Jew outfitter’s and bought them each a suit of broad check “dittoes,” which the salesman assured her were very fashionable in the country. John William obtained leave of absence from the manager of the theatre, washed off the “war paint,” and prepared for the journey, which he thought would be productive of some amusement.

“You are going to see your rich relation,” said the artist to John “so take care you behave yourself; he may leave you something in his will, but you must mind your P’s and Q’s.”

“Is he as rich as they say?” enquired Regulus.

“Rich! I should think so. Wait till you go to Lisdale. It will make you open your eyes a little.”

“Why don’t you go with us, father?” asked Regulus.

Mr. Sandford’s brow clouded.

“Don’t ask questions,” he replied; “get me my hat. I think I shall go round the corner and get a glass of ale.”

While Mrs. Sandford was thinking of making her appearance with her intelligent offspring at Lisdale Crag, and preparing the juvenile linen with much regard for rents and holes, Norman Balfour and Sir Beddoes Brady were also contemplating a visit to the paternal mansion. The Baronet found his supply of cash getting lamentably low, and after Norman's father had sent the proceeds of the timber, which the old steward had with a heavy heart seen felled, money became scarce with both of them. One day Sir Beddoes Brady exclaimed, "I must have some money, dear boy, from some quarter."

"Try the Jews," suggested Norman.

"Useless, dear boy."

"Why so?"

"They have discounted my bills until they are on the verge of ruin."

"How is it, then, that they do not arrest you?" asked Norman.

"Because, dear boy, they know that I should commit an act of bankruptcy, and they would get nothing."

"Oh! I begin to see."

"Is not that remark slightly suggestive of a nine-days-old puppy dog?" said Sir Beddoes, making an attempt at wit, "not that I want to be personal, dear boy; on the contrary, I venerate and respect you so much, that I would not for worlds, were they mine, hurt one of your feelings. Pardon the digression; we will return to our muttons, or rather our Jews. They, the Jews, not the muttons, live on hope and eighty per cent., because they know I have expectations, at least I tell them so, which is the same thing."

"That is an excellent joke," laughed Norman.

"It may be, but I dare swear they do not think so," replied Sir Beddoes Brady, dryly.

"Possibly not."

"And I must not laugh, for I am not out of the wood."

"Is the forest so dense?"

"The ligneous maize, excuse the periphrasis, is puzzling in the last degree. I like periphrases; for instance, it disturbs the equanimity of your matter-of-fact man, who says it rains to inform him that the night is remarkably humid; but *apropos* of money, dear boy, how is it to be obtained?"

"I am at a loss."

"Are the Gubernatorial purse strings tightly closed against your modest demands?"

"I regret to say, they are."

"But his doors are not!"

"Oh! no."

"Then I have a brilliant idea; we will close our town establishment, discharge our servants, sell our horses, and take refuge at Lisdale Crag, until the Derby is over. In the solitude of the country we shall be inexpensively happy. What do you say?"

"I have no objection whatever. I am sure my father will be only too glad to see any friend of mine, and especially so agreeable a companion as yourself."

"You overwhelm me, my dear boy," said Sir Beddoes, blandly.

"Are you fond of hunting?" inquired Norman.

"Passionately!"

"Can you spear an otter?"

"I cannot say that I ever tried."

"Then you shall have the opportunity."

In conversation like this the day passed, and all the preparations Sir Beddoes Brady spoke of were quickly made. They took with them a groom, and drove themselves into the country in a mail phaeton, thinking that would be a change from the eternal railway train.

"In a couple of hours," said Norman, "we arrive at Middleton, where, by the way, I advise we dine."

"Do you know a good hostelry?"

"An excellent one, kept by Mrs. Salter," replied Norman.

"*Bien!* We will halt there and recruit the inner man," said the lively Baronet, who liked cutlets *a la Maintenon*, and Moët's pink champagne.

Mrs. Salter, who kept the Balfour Arms, did her best to entertain her visitors, and sent them away very well satisfied. The champagne was so good that they ordered a second bottle, then a third, and, *après cela*, a fourth, which made Sir Beddoes Brady rather more exhilarated than usual.

Norman Balfour, mindful of the fact that he would speedily approach the parental presence, did not indulge so freely as his friend, and was desirous of taking the reins during the few remaining miles; but this Sir Beddoes would not hear of.

"No, no," he said, "let me alone. I'm not so fresh as to be unable to drive—not a bit of it. Let go her head."

This to the groom, who promptly obeyed the order, and off dashed the mare at an excellent pace.

The road for some miles ran parallel with the line, being only divided therefrom by a quick-set hedge, against which it seemed to be Sir Beddoes' ambition to drive.

"For Heaven's sake be cautious," exclaimed Norman.

"'fraid of a spill, dear boy," said Sir Beddoes, "all right. Sit still. The mare knows her way in the dark."

"Does she? That is more than you do," muttered Norman.

"My mare, hey along, lass!" cried the Baronet.

"Not so fast, Sir Beddoes," said Norman anxiously.

"Let her show her mettle."

"But our necks?"

"Bother our necks! Hey along, lass!"

"By Jove! look out! I told you what would happen."

It was *sauve qui peut*. Sir Beddoes Brady contrived to upset the trap in the most scientific manner, and the inmates fell lightly on the other side of the hedge unhurt, save by some few scratches and bruises.

"You're a nice fellow," exclaimed Norman Balfour, as he scrambled to his feet.

"So I have always heard," replied the unruffled Baronet.

"Deuced awkward though! Is the trap hurt?"

"Broke its back, I suppose."

"No, sir," interposed the groom. "Not so bad as that. If we can get it on its legs again it will be all right."

Sir Beddoes looked round, and saw a platelayer at work on the line; he was hard at work, as if labouring against time.

"My man," exclaimed Sir Beddoes.

No answer.

"Hi!"

"What is it, guv'nor?"

"Here's a job for you; I have upset my trap."

"So I see," replied the man.

"You shall have five shillings if you'll help to right it."

"Haven't the time."

"It is only a matter of five minutes."

"The train will be here directly, and this plate must be laid."

"Come, ten shillings. Never mind the—hic—train—hic," said Sir Beddoes, who became more intoxicated every minute.

The platelayer, tempted by the offer of so large a sum to him, hesitated, looked at his watch, then at the trap, and at his watch again; then he laid down his pick and came towards the trap; and was soon engaged in assisting the groom.

Suddenly a shrill whistle was heard.

The down train was approaching; the platelayer, whose work was unfinished, turned pale; he knew that he had miscalculated the time, and that an accident was inevitable; frantic with dismay he rushed up the bank, and seizing the loose rail endeavoured to place it in its proper position, but all in vain. While thus occupied the train swiftly rounded a curve.

The platelayer had not time to get out of the way, for the buffer of the engine caught him by the shoulder and tossed him into the road, where he fell a corpse; then it plunged into the earth and ran off the imperfect line, the carriages rushed up one against another with a frightful crash, and all was confusion, misery, and death.

Norman Balfour did all he could to assist the unfortunate passengers, twelve of whom were killed upon the spot, and the others more or less injured; it was an awful scene.

Sir Beddoes Brady was too intoxicated to be of any service; he was sitting on a bank, when the accident happened, and oblivious of the hurts of the travellers, he contented himself with saying, "Grand, sir; grand, by Jove! Never saw a railway smash before. Grand in the extreme! Hic—very grand!"

Norman cast a contemptuous glance upon him, and, with the help of the guard, proceeded to drag some bodies out of a second class carriage. They were those of a woman and two boys.

"Eh! What's this?" Norman exclaimed. "I know those faces. Can it be Mrs. Sandford and her children on their way to the Crag. Bless me! how singular."

When the bodies were laid upon the grass, they were found to be quite dead. Norman was right in his conjecture. Mrs. Sandford had started with John William and Regulus to visit her rich relative, but the platelayer's mistake had spoilt her plans; her ambitious projects were humbled to the dust, and her struggle with an unkind world was brought to an unexpected conclusion.

Such are a few of the Stories narrated by the pensioners in the Club-room of the Royal Mail. May they live long to amuse a virtuous old age in so innocent a manner.

THE DANGER SIGNAL.

I.—THE DANGER SIGNAL.

“Hi! Sir, you must not walk on the line; it is trespassing, and perhaps you don’t know the danger?”

This exclamation proceeded from a man of the average height, having rather a pale face and wearing a black velvet jacket, rather thin and threadbare at the seams and edges, which surmounted an imitation seal-skin waistcoat and a pair of corduroy breeches, all little the worse for wear. In his hand he carried a red serge flag rolled tightly round the handle.

The person he accosted was a tall, dark man, about forty years of age, respectably, if not fashionably dressed, having on a black frock-coat, and a hat of the species known as “deerstalker.” He held in his hand a heavy and formidable looking cudgel.

Turning abruptly round, the gentleman stood still, and regarded the man who had interrupted his progress.

He had climbed over the fence which separated a line of railway from the surrounding country, and was walking leisurely along between the metals, his eyes cast down and his thoughts apparently intent on some engrossing topic.

The person who brought him to such an abrupt stand-still was a signalman, who had emerged from his little box under the bank of a cutting.

The line, in this particular part of its design, ran through a tolerably deep cutting almost without any warning, round a curve into an open space flush with the level plain.

The signalman’s box was at the extremity of the cutting, and just before one came to the commencement of the curve. When in his box he could see distinctly up the cutting, but he could not discover anything that was going on in the open,

unless he emerged from his den and walked a few paces down the line and so mastered the curve.

The stranger turned, as we have said, and walked towards the signalman.

"Danger, did you say?" he exclaimed in a deep bass voice. "What danger can there be when I walk in the six foot way?"

"That's true, Sir," replied the signalman, a worthy fellow, by name William Miles. "But I thought it right to tell you, as many dreadful accidents have happened through people walking on the line; besides, it's my duty to warn all strangers off."

"I should have thought you'd quite enough to do to mind your signals," said the stranger.

"It fills up my time pretty well, Sir; but I've been here so long now that I'm well up to my work, and know to a minute, by the force of habit, when a train's coming, almost without looking at my watch."

"How do you pass your time?" asked the stranger, lighting a cigar and smoking it with evident satisfaction.

"Principally in my potato patch," said Miles. "Now the spring has broke and winter's gone I'm pretty near always in it; that is to say, during my spare time."

"Have much of a crop last year?"

"Can't say as I did, Sir; the rot got amongst the potatoes; and all the root crops was bad. It's my opinion that the potatoes is all worn out, and that we ought to grow from the seed. I've determined to make the experiment myself next year."

"A shrewd notion, and one worthy of a *savant*," exclaimed the stranger. "Here's a shilling for you; you needn't be alarmed about me; I'm only going as far as Old Bushey; and as the line is the shortest cut and the cleanest walking, I shall continue as I began."

"Very well, Sir; I didn't mean no offence," said Miles. "Having caught sight of you, it was my duty to warn you. I have done so, and if any harm was to happen to you, I could lie down with a clear conscience."

"Are you troubled with that luxury?"

"What, Sir?"

"A conscience."

"I hope so, Sir. I've got a wife and two children, and try to do what's right by them and by my employers. Ah! here's the old woman coming along with my dinner."

"Indeed ! well, I don't envy you your conscience, my agricultural friend," replied the stranger with a sinister smile. "But I suppose it is a weakness which unsophisticated people like yourself get into a way of fostering. Good-day to you."

"The same to you, Sir, and thank you for me," replied Miles.

The stranger in pursuing his course up the line had to pass the signalman's wife ; she gave him a quick searching glance, and when she reached her husband said, "What a bad face that gentleman's got, Bill !"

"It aint strikingly beautiful," said Miles dryly.

"What's he been talking to you about ?"

"Nothing much. I told him not to walk up the line, and we got into a little bit of palaver, that's all."

"I shouldn't like him to come inside my door ; he'd bring me bad luck, I'm afraid," said the little woman, shuddering, she knew not why.

Old Bushey is a small town in Staffordshire. The signalman's hut was situated about a mile from it. Not every train stopped there ; the express invariably ran through ; and as cattle-trains had to be shunted at Old Bushey, Miles's signals entailed a heavy responsibility upon that individual.

The stranger walked leisurely along in the direction of Old Bushey ; but when the station came in sight he swerved on one side, crossed the fence, left the line altogether, and entered the town by a side path with which he seemed perfectly familiar.

At the bottom of the High Street was a tavern, which had been in some request in the old posting days. Its old fashioned gateway and spacious court-yard, now surrounded with empty stables, the grass growing between the stones and having a general air of mildew and decay, spoke volumes of the past.

It was called the Trevor Arms.

The stranger passed under the portico or porch, and entering the coffee-room, rang the bell.

A waiter, wearing a rusty black suit and a very dirty tie, which had once been white, and whose hair was as long as a Methodist parson's, answered the summons.

"Bring me some brandy," exclaimed the stranger.

"Neat, or in water, Sir ?" asked the waiter.

"What the devil's that to do with you ?" said the stranger angrily. "Bring some brandy, and if I choose to drink it raw or mix it with water, that's my business, not yours."

"Beg —"

"Don't talk. Be off at once. I can't bear being talked to by servants."

The waiter vanished as if by magic; he had not been talked to in such a peremptory manner since the railway cut through that part of Staffordshire, and knocked po'-chaises and stage coaching on the head.

It was like old times. It was really quite refreshing. His eyes sparkled and unwonted elasticity came into his feet.

"Go of brandy, Miss, please, and look sharp, for gent at number two table, coffee-room," he exclaimed, to the young lady behind the bar.

The young lady behind the bar couldn't understand it at all.

"Why, Thomas!" she said, reproachfully, "what's come to you? you're waking up."

"Gent's got a will of his own, Miss, and knows what's what. I do believe he'll d—— my eyes presently."

And Thomas's superannuated face lighted up with a faint glow at the very suspicion of such an unusual event.

"I should think that would not be so very agreeable," said the young lady with a toss of the head, which sent her ringlets flying about her shoulders.

"Ah! you don't remember, Miss; you're too young; it was before your time. But the horn used to sound up the High Street tantivy! tantivy! and the four blood tits used to come spanking along, smoking and steaming; then the coachman would pull up with a jerk, and the insides and the outs would rush in, and the gentlemen, they *was* gentlemen in those days, would swagger about, and if they said they'd have a thing they meant it, and no mistake; but, what with steam and 'chinery and the 'lectoral franchise, Old England aint Old England; it's another place the go-aheads have been and manufactured out of the old materials."

Here the bell rang frantically, and Thomas, starting to his feet as if he had been shot, snatched up the brandy, crying, "Coming, Sir, coming;" adding to himself, "He'll swear, I know he will. It'll be blank your eyes this, and blank your eyes that. Oh! he's a real gentleman, every inch of him."

The stranger was staring out of the window when Thomas entered. Turning round he exclaimed:

"Where's my brandy, you son of a snail?"

"Here, Sir. Go of Cognac, Sir? Yes, Sir"

"Go and order my trap to be brought round at once, and tell the ostler to take up the curb two holes."

"Yes, Sir."

"At once; no loitering."

Thomas bowed, threw his napkin over his arm, and trotted away, muttering, "Son of a snail! well, I never did. Been called a many names in my life; but son of a snail! ha! ha! You've come to something, Thomas. They've reckoned up your imperfections, and twigged the rust on your hinges. Yes, you're bowled out at last, Thomas, for not keeping pace with the times. Son of a snail! well, I'm——"

"Thomas!"

It was the voice of the young lady behind the bar. While indulging in his soliloquy he had leant against the wall, and forgotten all about his errand.

"Aint you got nothing better to do than to stand with your back to the wall, a greasing the paper with your shiny 'ed, and laughing like a great baboon, Thomas?" continued the young lady.

"Yes, Miss; certainly I have."

Away he went to the yard, and delivered the message with which he was charged to the ostler, who quickly put a handsome chestnut horse between the shafts of a phaeton and led the horse round to the front door.

The stranger came forth as he heard the sound of the horse's hoofs and paid the bill, giving the waiter and the ostler handsome gratuities for themselves.

In another minute he had grasped the reins, and touching the chestnut lightly on the flank, was soon rattling over the stones, at the rate of twelve miles an hour, in the direction of Stafford.

The waiter looked after him until he was out of sight, and then, shaking his head dismally, exclaimed with a sigh, "One of the good old sort; pity there aint more of 'em."

And with another shake of the head, he walked pensively into the inn, and stamped his foot savagely upon a penny paper, because it was a sign of progress.

The stranger drove for some distance, and, having arrived at the gates of a lodge, leading up to a baronial-looking mansion dimly visible amidst the trees, now budding into leaf, struck his whip against the windows.

A neatly-dressed woman came out, and with a respectful courtesy admitted him. A drive up a splendid avenue brought him to the front of the mansion. It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon. A young lady dressed in a riding-habit was standing on the steps, talking to a handsome gentleman about her own age, while a groom led away a couple of

horses, whose mud bespattered condition showed that they had travelled some distance that day.

"Oh ! Mr. Medicott," exclaimed the young lady, "where have you been ? We rode into Stafford, but could see nothing of you."

"I took a turn in the country," replied the stranger who was addressed as Mr. Medicott. "When I drive I rather avoid the haunts of men."

"We shall begin to look upon you quite as a hermit."

"Not quite, Miss Rivers, I hope," he replied.

"Well, you must be more sociable, under pains and penalties."

"I will try to mend my ways," he answered ; "but since you have been so well squired you can hardly regret my absence."

The latter part of this speech was accompanied by a vengeful look at the man standing by Miss Rivers, and who had evidently been her companion.

"Not at all. Mr. Seaton requires a little harmless rivalry, to stimulate him to conversational exertion," answered Laura Rivers, smiling.

"'Three is company, and two is none.' There is much truth in those old sayings, Miss Rivers," returned Mr. Medicott.

"Perhaps," she answered carelessly.

Gathering up her skirt, she threw it over her arm and entered the house, leaving the two gentlemen together.

Miss Laura Rivers was a lovely blonde, scarcely one and twenty years of age. Her round, smiling, good-natured face made her friends wherever she went, and, what was more, gained her lovers.

She was the only daughter and heiress of Sir Dudley Rivers, the owner of the old Hall to which we have introduced our readers.

Mr. Henry Medicott, a gentleman who had retired from the army, and Mr. Claude Seaton, a barrister, were the guests of Sir Dudley.

They were both passionately enamoured of Laura Rivers, and Mr. Medicott fancied that the young lady slightly encouraged the pretensions of his rival.

This belief made him morose and unsociable, though he could be a gay and entertaining companion if he chose.

Mr. Medicott did not wish to gain Laura Rivers's heart because she was rich ; he himself was tolerably well-endowed with this world's goods. He really loved her, and felt that

life would not be worth having unless she consented to be his wife.

Mr. Seaton had the advantage of youth. He was handsome and light-hearted, and Sir Dudley had a high opinion of him, as a man of good principles and considerable promise.

He predicted a grand success for him when he began to practise his profession, which he intended to do shortly.

He had that day spoken words of love to Laura, which she had received without displeasure, though she gave him but scant encouragement.

Mr. Medicott feared that he would stand no chance with his rival, but he determined to seize some opportunity of privately conversing with Miss Rivers, confessing his love, and begging hers in return.

The opportunity soon came. Sir Dudley took Mr. Seaton with him to shoot rabbits, and, being left to themselves, Mr. Medicott and Laura went out riding.

After a splendid gallop, which brought the colour into their cheeks, they pulled up, and walked their horses leisurely along a narrow lane.

"Do you not miss Mr. Seaton?" enquired Medicott, abruptly.

"Yes," answered Laura, frankly. "He is a nice fellow, and a delightful companion."

"A candid admission," said Medicott, with acerbity.

"Why should I not be candid? I have said nothing offensive in any way, I hope, to you?" replied Miss Rivers, regarding him with her full, lustrous blue eyes.

"Nothing whatever; you have a perfect right to select your companions. I only regret that my presence should be considered an intrusion."

"Not in the least; you are both good companions. What more can I say?"

"A great deal, if you only would."

"About what?"

This point blank question somewhat embarrassed Mr. Medicott. In the silence of his own chamber he had rehearsed his part and provided for just such a contingency; but his ideas were all scattered to the winds, and he stammered, on the impulse of the moment—

"Oh, Miss Rivers, if you would only listen to me!"

"I am entirely at your service," she replied, "for I do not suppose you will insult me and degrade yourself, by saying anything to which I ought not to listen."

"I—I have been longing, for weeks past, to tell you how much I love you, but I lacked the courage," he stammered.

Laura Rivers reddened.

"Mr. Medicott!" she ejaculated.

"Yes, yes," he continued; "I knew you would be furious directly I talked of love. That young puppy of a fellow has forestalled me, I know it! Fool that I was, not to see it before humiliating myself by an avowal, the nature of which you cannot mistake!"

"No, Mr. Medicott, I do not mistake it," replied Laura, calmly but with frigid dignity.

"You discard me! You trample upon my feelings! It is as I suspected!"

"I should be sorry to trample upon or hurt anybody's feelings, especially one of my dear father's trusted friends. I regret your confession of love for me, which does me great honour, and of which I am not worthy, being only a giddy girl, with some face and a little charm of manner. I regret it, I say, because I cannot love you in return, in the way you wish me to love you. As a brother, I should always regard you with the purest friendship."

Mr. Medicott shook his head sadly.

"I was afraid of this," he said; "my intuitions told me of it."

"You cannot blame me. I am unable to compel my affections," said Laura.

"No, I don't suppose that you have any such ability, but I was madman enough to hope that I could win you. I see, however, that I am too late."

"Am I to consider that a personal insult, Sir?" asked Miss Rivers angrily.

"What have I said? God knows what has come over me. I am not myself. Pray forgive me if I have said anything to displease you."

"I think we had better go home," said Laura, turning her horse's head.

He allowed her to get almost out of sight, then, lashing his horse fiercely with his whip, he tore along the road and with ease overtook her.

"Miss Rivers," he said.

"Well, Sir."

"One word, if you please."

She inclined her head stiffly.

"Is there any chance that in the course of time your opinions may undergo any modification?"

"None."

"That's final?"

"As final as human inclination and will can make it."

"Thank you," he said; adding after a pause, "Then you give me no hope?"

"Of what?" she queried.

"That you will ever be my wife?"

"I can give you none, because I cannot recognise the possibility of such an union."

"That's enough. Forget if you can that I have spoken to you on this subject, and let us be friends, as you kindly suggested just now. Brother and sister; was not that it? Is not that the relation in which we are henceforth to stand to one another?"

"Yes," replied Laura, with a slight tinge of tenderness in her tone.

"God bless you my sister, my dear, dear sister," he exclaimed fervently.

She made no reply, and the conversation dropped.

The ride home was a weary one. The distance had never seemed so long before. Laura cantered, trotted, galloped, but a certain distance had to be traversed, and the best horse that ever lived could not have transported her at the pace she desired.

Some days elapsed.

Laura fancied that Mr. Medicott had forgotten his repulse, because he seemed equable and resigned when in her presence.

"I was right to forget him," she said. "He evidently did not care much for me, or he would show it more."

She was mistaken.

Henry Medicott suffered acutely. What if the volcano does not emit fire and smoke,—the subterranean fire rages still, does it not?

I think it was about a fortnight after the refusal Medicott had received, that Sir Dudley Rivers asked him to accompany him in search of snipe.

When they got into the open country Sir Dudley said, "There was one thing I forgot to tell you last night about Laura."

"What about Laura?" enquired Medicott, in a voice he in vain tried to keep firm.

"Young Seaton has asked her to be his wife. Laura referred the matter to me and I have consented. He is a steady young fellow; a little too young, though, that's all I have against him."

I once thought you were to be the man, Medicott, but I suppose you are wedded to the charms of a bachelor life."

"She wouldn't have an old fellow like me," Medicott replied in a jesting tone.

"Did you ever try?"

"My time for finding favour in the eyes of the fair is over," he answered, avoiding the question.

"I am sure I don't see why it should be," said Sir Dudley.

"But tell me have I done a right thing, do you think?"

"As Miss Rivers has consulted her inclination, she will no doubt secure lasting happiness; that is if she is old enough to know her own mind."

"Seaton goes to London to-morrow by the express to tell his father the news, and——"

"To-morrow?" cried Medicott eagerly.

"Yes."

"By the express?"

"Yes."

"From Stafford?"

"I think so," answered Sir Dudley, looking wonderingly at him.

"Ah! well, I hope he will be happy. I like to see all young people happy. The express, I think you said?"

"Why, hang it, man, I've said so twice."

"Yes, to be sure. Pardon me."

"Mark, woodcock!" cried the gamekeeper, who was a little behind them.

This gave a turn to their thoughts, and no more was said about the approaching marriage.

Mr. Medicott fired and missed. He loaded his own gun and the caps repeatedly missed fire. At last the keeper drew the charge. He had put the shot in before the powder.

"Your wits are wool-gathering to-day," cried Sir Dudley with a laugh. "One of the best shots in Staffordshire, and to load a gun like that?"

The day was made up of similar blunders by Mr. Medicott, and Sir Dudley was not sorry when the time came for them to return. His companion was so unlike himself and so uninteresting.

When Medicott reached the Hall he sought his private room, and opening his portmanteau took from it a Bradshaw, which he consulted diligently.

"The express leaves Stafford," he muttered, "at 2:30, which

would bring it to Old Bushey about 2·45, or thereabouts ; that will do."

At dinner he was externally serene. Addressing Seaton he said, "So you leave to-morrow, I hear?"

"I do," replied Seaton laconically.

"By the express?"

"Yes. 2·30, I think it is, from Stafford."

In the evening Medlicott sat down beside Laura on the sofa.

"So you are happy, my sister?" he asked.

"You have heard——"

"All."

"Yes. I am very, very happy," she answered, casting down her eyes.

"Beware!" said Medlicott.

"Of what?"

"Oh! I know not. I have been told that there is no such thing as perfect happiness in this sublunary sphere, and I have heard of such a thing as a slip between the cup and the lip."

"Oh! this is cruel," cried Laura, the tears starting to her eyes.

"Forgive me. I only wish to remind you of the uncertainty of human affairs, so that if anything should happen you will be prepared for the shock."

"If anything should happen! what do you mean?"

"Nothing. It is only a lesson founded on an old text," he answered hastily.

"Is this brotherly love?" she asked reproachfully.

"Yes, although you do not now think so."

He moved away. Sir Dudley had asked him to play a game at backgammon with him.

Claude Seaton took Laura to the piano and asked her to sing. He turned over the music for her, but, before she had gone far she broke down lamentably, bursting into tears, and was unable to sing another note.

Seaton endeavoured to comfort her, and asked her the cause of her sudden indisposition.

"It is nothing, dear Claude. I am weak and silly, that is all. Excuse me to-night. I am not well."

He led her back to the sofa, and, seating himself by her side, slipped his arm round her waist, and whispered soft nothings into her ear.

She grew calm, but was very low spirited all the evening. Medlicott's foreboding had preyed upon her mind; she could not shake off a sense of impending evil.

Early the next morning Medlicott drove over to Old Bushey, put up the trap at the Old World Inn, and walked into the country.

A thick fog hung over the land, making it difficult to perceive any object at a distance, but he found his way easily enough to the line, along which he walked, as he had done on that former occasion when we introduced him to the reader.

Beneath his heavy great coat he carried a small crowbar. When he reached a certain part of the line he halted, produced the bar of iron, and looked around him as if studying the ground.

The cutting at the entrance to which the signalman's hut was situated was from eighteen to twenty yards off.

The arm of the signal post was just visible through the mist, which, as the sun acquired power, was gradually lifting.

Looking at his watch, Mr. Medlicott saw that it was two o'clock.

"I must to work," he muttered.

Seizing the crowbar in a determined and powerful grasp, he set himself to work to remove the rails along which the London and Stafford express must shortly pass.

The task was a herculean one, but its difficulty did not deter him from making the attempt.

In half an hour he had succeeded in raising three rails on one side, and two on the other.

These he piled one above the other, so as to throw the train off the track. Nothing could save the express but the exposure of the danger signal by Miles. He however was quietly digging in his potato patch, a child, who had brought him his dinner, playing by his side.

Presently the child, restless, and tired of watching its father dig, strayed on to the line, and walked along some few yards.

It was not for a few minutes that Miles noticed the absence of his child, a little fair haired creature for whom he had the greatest love.

"Lucy!" he cried.

Receiving no answer the truth flashed upon him.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "she's on the line and the London express is well nigh due."

He glanced hastily at his watch.

It was five and twenty minutes to three.

"She's due at the quarter," he muttered.

Hastily throwing down his spade he ran to the line. Lucy was nowhere to be seen. She had strayed past the cutting

and was on the level, curiously regarding Mr. Medicott, who with his arms folded stood surveying his handiwork.

"Lucy, child, where are you?" cried William Miles anxiously.

A tiny voice replied in the far distance, but it was unintelligible. It gave Miles, however, an idea of the child's whereabouts, and running forward he caught her in his arms, chiding her for her recklessness.

"I thought I told you, my dear," he said, "never to go on the line. It is dangerous; if a train came by it would kill you."

"I was looking at the man, father," replied Lucy.

"The man! What man?"

"There he is. Don't you see him?"

Miles did now, but he had not seen him previously. He saw something else too, and that was the gap in the rails.

Putting Lucy down on the side of the line, and telling her not to move, he rushed back to his signal station.

His first idea was to hoist the danger signal.

That would effectually stop the advance of the express, for the fog was so much thinner that the signals could be seen at some distance.

He had recognised Medicott and feared that he had a madman to contend with.

Medicott uttered a howl like that of a wild beast when he found that he was discovered and that the danger signal was hoisted.

Springing forward, he caught hold of the signalman's child, and indicated by violent gestures that he would murder it if the signal was not lowered.

William Miles was as one demented; he knew not what to do. Surely a father was never before placed in such an awful position.

His duty was clear. Even if Medicott fulfilled his threat, was it not better that one should perish, than that calamity and death should overtake a whole train full of people?

If it had been any one but the darling of his heart, his little Lucy, he would have said yes, but to lose her was hard indeed.

He saw Medicott place her on the tufted grass, and bend over her with the iron bar raised.

Miles's hand was on the signal. A tiny wail came to him. It was too much. The signal fell, and Miles had saved his child's life.

Running to the spot he raised her in his arms, kissed her a dozen times, and ran back to the station.

Medlicott penetrated his design and followed him, seizing his arm just as he was on the point of again raising the signal.

Lucy fell to the ground and crawled, crying, away from the feet of the two men, between whom an awful struggle was going on.

A puff of white smoke in the valley showed Miles that the express was rushing headlong to destruction.

Making a prodigious effort Miles grasped the handle of the signal, and, with a jerk, sent it up to danger.

The red arm stood out bold and defiant. Would the driver see it? The express had just rounded a curve and was steaming grandly along in a straight line.

Still the struggle continued. Medlicott made frantic efforts to undo the work Miles had providentially accomplished, but without avail.

Miles was becoming rapidly exhausted; he felt that he could not hold out much longer, the strain on his endurance was too great.

Suddenly a shrill whistle was heard, followed by another and another in quick succession.

The driver of the express had seen the signal, and he was shutting off the steam.

"Saved! Saved!" cried Miles, wildly. He could say no more.

Mr. Medlicott uttered a curse, and shaking Miles's hold off, stalked suddenly away. The signalman would have stopped him if he could, but his strength was gone, and he could only sob and cry like a child.

The express came to a stand-still within a few yards of the dangerous spot. Getting down from his engine, the driver walked up to the signalman's hut.

"What's this, mate?" he cried, slapping Miles on the back.

Miles sprang up like one waking from a bad dream.

Then he told his story, and detailed how he had only been able to save the lives of the passengers by a miracle.

The people alighted as soon as they could get the guard to unlock the doors, and some of them crowded round the signalman to hear his story.

Among them was Claude Seaton. When he heard the recital he joined with the others in heaping curses on the head of the villain, and in thanking Providence for the narrow escape they had enjoyed.

As he moved away he saw something lying in the grass. He stooped down and found it was a cigar case. Just as he

was about to call general attention to his discovery he beheld the initial letters H.M. upon it.

Instantly he recognised the case. Instantly the awful truth burst upon his terrified senses.

Medlicott, his friend, the guest at that moment of his father-in-law that was to be, Medlicott his rival, had planned a diabolical catastrophe in the hope of seeing him amongst the slain.

Hiding the case away, he beckoned to Miles, and getting him in the rear of his hut and alone, said to him, "Have you a vivid recollection of the man with whom you struggled?"

"I have, Sir," he answered, his voice still trembling a little.

"You have? Describe him."

"Tall, dark, with an eagle eye and a restless glance; a bad expression of countenance; well dressed; bushy whiskers, thick moustache and——"

"Enough. It is he!" cried Mr. Seaton. "The gentleman is my—my friend, signalman, and I will make it worth your while to give a different description of him to the authorities. No harm luckily has been done, and he must not suffer for this."

"Well, Sir, it can easily be done. I can put them off the scent as well as on it," replied Miles. "I am a poor man and can find no interest in hunting any one down."

"I repeat I will make it well worth your while, and you may take this as an earnest of what I will do," said Mr. Seaton, giving him his purse, which was well filled with golden sovereigns.

"All right, Sir," said Miles, smiling gleefully; "I haven't said anything about his appearance yet, and I shall say he was short and fair. Leave it all to me. They can't convict without me."

Charles Seaton went back by a hired conveyance to Sir Dudley Rivers, resolving to start for London again the next day. He told the baronet what had happened, but informed Laura that he had missed the train.

The baronet commended him for his generosity, and was inexpressibly shocked to think that Medlicott could have acted in such a dastardly manner.

They supposed he would leave the country, but they were mistaken.

That evening some working men brought a corpse on a shutter to the Hall. A gentleman had blown his brains out with a pistol.

It was Henry Medlicott.

II.—MY TRAVELLING COMPANION.

MR. JOHN STUART MONTEITH was a Treasury clerk, and, as his name implies, of Scotch extraction. He always used to take the modest holiday which the government allowed him somewhere about the end of August, so that he might come in for the shooting season; shooting being a pastime of which he was very fond.

He had many friends in Scotland, amongst whom he numbered Mr. Gordon Paulett, M.P. for a northern borough. Mr. Paulett had invited him to spend six weeks with him at his shooting box of Strathspey in Invernesshire, and he had accepted the invitation.

On his way to the Highlands Mr. John Stuart Monteith met with a little adventure, which he afterwards told when the port was placed on the table, and called "My Travelling Companion." It became a stock story, and Mr. John Stuart Monteith received innumerable invitations to people's places on account of it.

When the conversation flagged after dinner the host would say, "By the way, Monteith, did you ever tell Lady so-and-so that adventure of yours? You didn't! then pray do so. I am sure it will be a treat to all of us."

And I am going to tell you my readers the story of "My Travelling Companion" just as I heard it one evening, when my legs were comfortably reposing under Lord B——'s hospitable mahogany.

"I am not much of a hand at story telling," began Mr. John Stuart Monteith; "it's rather out of my usual line. Doing sums and that sort of thing is how we get our daily bread at the office. If I had the narrative power of a Scheherazade, why there would soon be a sequel to the Arabian Nights. I am just going to tell you what happened to me on my way to Scotland. Three or four years ago my dear old friend Gordon Paulett had given me an invitation to visit him at Strathspey to knock the grouse about and see what the black game were made of.

"A more congenial pastime he could not have thought of as far as I was concerned, for give me a gun, and something to fire at, and I'll ask for nothing else." Some one irreverently suggested a hay stack, but Mr. Monteith, annihilating him with a look, continued—

"I started from King's Cross, and, as usual, the station was pretty well crowded. There were members of parliament—the House was just up—glad to escape from the weary monotony of parliamentary work. There were merchants with evil looking dogs and gun cases, of both of which they seemed afraid, going for a turn on the moors, a sprinkling of ladies, of whom I fought particularly shy, because I enjoy a cigar more when travelling than at any other time, and don't like to be shut out from my favourite enjoyment.

"Finding the guard I tipped him half-a-crown, a proceeding which he understood and appreciated.

"'Carriage to yourself, Sir? No, Sir, can't do that,' he said. But here's a coupé, and I'll promise not to put more than one gentleman in along with you.'

"'That'll do,' I replied, seeing the porter put my gun case and sundry other traps under the seat; then securing my seat by placing a variety of coats and papers in a particular corner, I strolled up and down the station until the train started, watching the confusion worse confounded which reigned everywhere.

"The bell rang, and it was time to take my seat. I found the corner I had left empty occupied by a gentlemanly looking young fellow about five and twenty, I should say.

"His appearance was that of a military man, though his whiskers were a little beyond the regulation size. His dress was as scrupulously neat as—as, may I say my own? for that issaying something. I have been called the D'Orsay of the office; and the under secretary oncesaid in my hearing that I resembled a pocket Brummel. However, that is neither here nor there. I do not want to be accused of egotism, but I must say that the man was as well dressed as myself.

"This prepossessed me in his favour. I like to see a well dressed man; and when the train started I offered him an illustrated paper to look at.

"He took it with thanks, though I saw afterwards that he had a duplicate of it. This act of politeness—for such it was—also pleased me, and when he began to talk I did not snub him as I ought to have done, but entered into a conversation with him.

"'Going far?' he asked me carelessly.

"'Well, yes. I am going to the north.'

"'The north! Oh! then we shall part company at Carlisle.'

"'Is that your destination?' I enquired.

"'For the present, yes. Going shooting, I suppose,' he added. 'Fond of shooting? Got your popguns under the seat, I see.'

“‘I am very fond of it.’

“‘And a decent shot, I’ll bet,’ he exclaimed. ‘You have the eye for it. You don’t give the beggars much chance, I’ll lay a wager.’

“‘I don’t know whether I am more susceptible of flattery than most men, but the fellow touched me in a tender part. I am told I shoot well, and I believe people when they tell me so.

“‘I can make a pretty good bag, but I haven’t had much chance lately. I shall get a few days where I am going, though,’ he continued.

“‘Like myself, I suppose, you are tied to London?’

“‘Yes, with red tape,’ he answered, smiling.

“‘Red tape! Are you in a government office?’

“‘War,’ he replied laconically.

“‘Indeed! What department?’

“‘Accountant General’s.’

“‘Really! I am delighted to make your acquaintance. I am in the Treasury. There is my card. Mr. John Stuart Monteith, you will perceive.’

“‘I handed him the gilt edged pasteboard, and he carefully read the name before putting the card in his pocket.

“‘I haven’t a card,’ he said. ‘But my name’s Kenney—Arthur Kenney, and I shall be very glad if you will drop in any day at the office.’

“‘I shall have much pleasure,’ I replied.

“‘Now don’t forget. I hate making a jolly acquaintance, and losing it simply because a fellow is too lazy to remember a name or an address. Don’t fail to come.’

“‘If not, you can look me up,’ I suggested.

“‘Ah! to be sure. I forgot that. It’s almost as stupid as Dr. Johnson cutting two holes in his door for his cats, a big one for the mother and a little one for the kitten.’

“‘We laughed at this little pleasantry, and soon began to smoke. Mr. Kenney offered me his case, and liking the look of his weeds I took one, and on smoking it found it remarkably good.

“‘Now it is a way of mine to think that a good man can never smoke a bad cigar. If it is an infallible rule to go by, if you want to tell a gentleman, to look at his hat and boots, so is a good cigar a sign of innate gentility. At all events I think so.

“‘We travelled a hundred miles or so, and then the iron horse stopped to drink. I had fallen off to sleep, and dreamt a bad dream.

"I thought a fierce looking man was bending over me, examining my watch, and looking intently at a valuable diamond ring I wore to confine a black tie I had round my neck.

"Waking up with a start, I looked at Kenney. He was gazing out of the window and watching the bustle at the station into which the train had just glided.

"Just woke up?" he exclaimed. "I saw you were off to the Land of Nod, and knowing what it is to want forty winks, I would not wake you."

"Very considerate of you," I answered. "Where are we now?"

"He told me the name of the station, and added, 'Shall you get out to stretch your legs?'"

"Not yet. Wait till the next stop, I think."

"I shall just take a turn. Keep my place, will you?"

"He got out and walked up and down the platform until the guard, with his usual suavity, informed him that it was time to reseat himself.

"As he was getting into the carriage he caught his foot against a part of his luggage, a carpet bag, which fell forward with a clanking noise.

"Any one would think you were travelling in the iron trade," I exclaimed.

"Yes, they would," he replied frankly.

"I was dying with curiosity to know what he could have in the carpet bag that would make such a clanking noise.

"He took up his paper, *The Saturday Review*, I think, read a little while, lighted up another weed, and took a deep pull from his brandy flask.

"At last, piqued out of my silence, I so far overstepped the bounds of decorum as to say, 'I beg your pardon, but I should esteem it a favour if you would tell me what you have in your carpet bag; that is to say, if you do not consider it an impertinent question.'

"It is an impertinent question, as you must very well know," returned my travelling companion; "but I don't mind answering it. My father is the governor of Carlisle Castle. It is not what it was in former times when Vich Ian Vohr was executed in front of it. It is nothing better than a gaol now; and as I was coming down from town to spend a few weeks with him, I got a letter from the old boy asking me to call at a certain ironmonger's for a few sets of handcuffs and leg-irons, which it appears they can't get down there."

"Indeed!" I replied, a little stiffly, for I was not exactly

pleased at having been so friendly with a man whose father was a gaol governor, though I have since been told that they are a highly respectable class of men, chiefly selected from the army. However, there is no accounting for prejudice. It will exist, and often is unfounded.

"He saw the change in the expression of my face, I think, for he went immediately on:

"'I don't know that there is anything to be ashamed of in the fact which I have just announced to you; and if there is, I don't suppose you are the sort of fellow to think worse of another for any blot which may hang about him indirectly.'

"'Not at all. I beg you won't think so for an instant,' I hastened to say.

"'That's all right. I know my father to be a highly respectable man, but some people might not think so much of him as I do, just because he's governor of a gaol.'

"I began to like him for the persistent way in which he stuck up for his father.

"'Don't say another word, old fellow. I am proud to know you, as I said before,' was my answer.

"'Curious things,' he exclaimed, taking up the carpet bag.

"'What are?'

"'Why, handcuffs.'

"'I should like to see some.'

"Opening the bag he displayed some brightly polished irons, and held up one pair to my view with the key attached.

"'Not much chance of getting out of those, eh?' he said, laughing.

"'Not much.'

"'Did you ever have a pair on?'

"'What!' I exclaimed, indignantly.

"'In fun, I mean,' he explained.

"'Oh! in fun. That's another thing. No. I never had a pair on in fun.'

"'Try 'em,' he continued. 'They won't hurt you.'

"I don't know exactly what induced me to consent to this proposition, but consent I did, and on the impulse of the moment put out my hands.

"In an instant, with the rapidity of a flash of lightning, the irons were round my wrists; the key turned with a jerk, and snapped off the string, which had held it to the handcuffs.

"'How do you feel?' asked Mr. Arthur Kenney, indulging in what seemed to me mightily like a chuckle.

“‘Oh ! I don’t know. All right, I suppose. So this is how they cripple the dangerous classes ?’

“‘That’s how the trick’s done, Sir.’

“‘Oh ! well, I don’t think I should very much care about being a “dangerous class.”’

“‘Better keep out of it,’ he answered. ‘But I’ve got a proposition to make. Suppose you and I get up some amateur theatricals.’

“‘What do you mean ?’ I asked, staring at him wonderingly.

“‘This. You be a swell travelling to Scotland to shoot grouse, and you get into conversation with a man you don’t know anything about. That’s me. You get talking and be very friendly, like a fool, you know, and at last you find out I’m an awful duffer,—a thief, in fact,—and I rob you of all your property, after handcuffing you, so that you can’t do anything to help yourself.’

“‘It would be a good joke,’ I said, feeling uncomfortable. ‘But I don’t exactly see the pull of it now. Just take these beastly things off, will you ?’

“‘Wait a bit. I want to go through these amateur theatricals. It’s such a lark ! Now you’re the swell and I’m the thief.’

“‘I let him have his own way because I couldn’t help doing so.

“‘Now let’s begin. Give me that ring of yours,’ he went on.

“‘You’d better take it,’ I said, with a subdued groan.

“‘You see I began to grow suspicious. I didn’t like the way things were going on, and these amateur theatricals didn’t somehow look at all healthy.

“‘He took the ring, held it up to the light, and admired the water. Then he slipped it on his finger.

“‘I’ll have the watch next, and after that your purse. I think I ought to act the character thoroughly. How do I do it ?’ he said.

“‘To the life,’ I replied.

“‘Ah ! a man doesn’t know what he can do till he tries. A fine watch,’ he remarked, as he took it and the chain from my pocket. ‘Purse well lined ? Yes ; two or three flimsies and some gold.’

“‘Thirty pounds in all, I think,’ I said.

“‘About that. It is not worth while to count it. Thieves never do that until afterwards ; that is, until they’ve got clear off with their booty.’

“‘How will you act that little part of the drama ?’

“‘That is a difficulty easily bridged.’

“‘How?’

“‘Why, when we get near the next station at which we stop, which will be (here he looked at my watch) in one hour and twenty minutes, or thereabouts, I shall open the door of the carriage, jump out, accommodating myself to the motion of the train, and bolt across the fields.’

“‘And after that?’

“‘Well, it wouldn’t be consistent with my professional character——’

“‘Assumed professional character.’

“‘Thank you. It would not be consistent with my assumed—he laid a stress on the word—professional character to tell you that. You’ll excuse me, I know, for not taking those bracelets off just yet. I’ll put the key here’—he touched the window sill as he spoke—‘so that when I’m gone you can tell the guard, and you won’t suffer any inconvenience from the manacles.’

“‘He deposited the key and I laughed in an applauding manner. The laugh was somewhat hollow, to be sure, for I began to grow very uneasy.

“‘Come,’ I exclaimed, ‘take these things off, will you? You have acted capitally.’

“‘You think so?’

“‘Yes. Dick Turpin could not have done it better. The farce has lasted long enough,’ I said impatiently.

“‘Yes, the farce is over; the serio-comic business begins now,’ he answered coolly.

“‘What is that?’

“‘You will see as you go on. I said at the beginning that you were the silly young swell going to shoot grouse in Scotland.’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Well, that was the truth. I also said, “I am the thief;” that was the truth also.’

“‘God bless me! You don’t mean it! You—you’re not a thief, really?’

“‘Yes I am, and a devilish clever one too; not a vulgar, common, pettifogging, area-sneaking thief, but a most successful daylight robber.’

“‘Then your father isn’t governor of Carlisle Castle?’

“‘No more than yours is.’

“‘I sank back on the luxurious cushions with which the carriage was lined, and uttered the deepest and longest sigh I think I ever gave vent to.

"Sold, by Jove!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, that's as safe as houses. I've eased you of your "pewter," and it's no use howling. Good sell, isn't it?" the fellow had the impudence to say.

"I groaned; the power of speech being temporarily taken away from me, I could do nothing else.

"There will be a jolly row," he added, 'when the train gets to S——' (this was the next station). 'I've done this sort of thing before, and always got out at S——. The inspector there is a man of the name of Tanner, and he'll tear his hair. I'm off to Paris to-morrow. Tell him that, will you? it will be the "straight tip" for him.'

"You are an impudent scoundrel," I exclaimed, growing angry, 'and I will do all in my power to bring you to justice.'

"I've heard that before, but the event didn't come off, any more than it will through you," he answered, in a perfectly unconcerned manner.

"When you get back to the War Office——" I began.

"You aint such a fool as to believe that, are you?" he interrupted.

"I forgot," I said. 'I see what a consummate fool I have been, and what a disreputable ruffian you are.'

"Take my advice, Mr. Monteith, and don't be such an ass again as to speak to, or make pals of, people you don't know anything about," he exclaimed, seriously; 'you've got the experience now, and you've bought it cheaply.'

"I wish I had you within range of a horsewhip!"

"Say what you like, I shan't be offended. Naturally your feelings are a little hurt; mine would be, under the circumstances. Do you set any particular store by the ring or the watch?"

"The watch was my grandfather's."

"I'll tell you why I ask: if it would be any gratification, I'll send you the watch in a few weeks' time."

"Keep it, and be hanged to you!" I replied. I had been on the point of exploding for some time. 'I will have nothing to do with you, and I will be under no obligation to such a wretch!'

"Civil words cost nothing, Mr. Monteith," he said, lighting one of the cigars I had liked so much.

"You shall have no civility from me," I answered; 'and I warn you that I will not rest night or day until I bring you to the Old Bailey.'

“‘What will become of the grouse?’ said he. ‘No, Sir, you talk nonsense. You will bluster a little to the police, and threaten a great deal, and the result will be absolutely *nil*!’

“I leant back in my corner and preserved a sullen silence.

“The train was going at least forty miles an hour. I looked out into the darkness, and saw the light of a station glimmer as we dashed past.

“‘My time will come,’ I thought.

“‘You are a very unsociable companion,’ exclaimed Mr. Arthur Kenney. ‘I think you are behaving in a most unhand-some way to me. I have beguiled the monotony of the journey with amateur theatricals, and now you are as sullen as a post, and rather less loquacious.’

“I made him no answer.

“Taking up a paper, he continued to smoke and read for a long time. It seemed an interminable period to me.

“Suddenly the train slackened speed perceptibly. Putting on his hat, Mr. Kenney buttoned up his great coat, seized his carpet bag, and said—

“‘The best friends must part. I must tear myself away. Don’t forget Arthur Kenney, and mind you look in at the office. Perhaps you wonder why I take my carpet bag? It’s my stock in trade. I shall do some more private theatricals on my way back.’

“‘Which way are you going?’ I asked.

“‘Catch an old bird with chaff, eh?’ he said. ‘Never mind, I forgive you; and, what is more, I’ll tell you what train I shall return by.’

“I listened eagerly.

“‘Here we are at S——. Well, I shall leave S—— by the 7-30 to-morrow evening, and if you are on the platform at Euston Square, I will give you the ticket of your watch, which I intend to pawn at S—— this evening if the shops are not shut. It is past seven now; by George, I shall have to make haste. Well, good-bye, Monteith; I have had a very pleasant journey. Here’s to our next meeting!’

“The fellow drained his flask, and put it in his pocket; then he opened the door of the carriage, got deftly on to the step, sprang to the ground running with the train, and, as I peered after him into the darkness, I saw him walking rapidly across a field in the direction of the lights of the large town of S——. A minute or two afterwards we were in the station.

“My face burned with a hot flush as I called to the guard, and told him, in brief and hasty words, what had happened.

"He could scarcely believe me at first, and I think took me for a prisoner without his keeper. Luckily Mr. Kenney had left the key of the handcuffs, and I was speedily released.

" 'Better get out here, Sir,' said the guard, 'I can't wait—must go on with the train; but the station-master will hear your complaint, and the police will do the rest.'

"He hastily got my luggage out of the carriage and the van. I alighted, and despatched a porter at once for the station-master. He came and listened attentively to my story, about which he was not in the least sceptical.

"The superintendent of police was sent for, and he promptly took the matter in hand. I was asked a thousand questions, all of which I answered to the best of my ability.

"My replies were taken down on paper, and the superintendent went away, after recommending me to a hotel, where he promised to come as soon as he had anything to communicate.

"I was glad to get into a comfortable room, and pay my respects to a good and substantial dinner.

"Scarcely had I finished before the superintendent sent word he wished to see me. I had him up and he showed me my watch.

" 'So you have caught the rascal!' I exclaimed, with my usual alacrity in jumping to conclusions. 'It does you great credit.'

" 'We've got the watch but not the man, Sir,' the superintendent said. 'The watch was pledged an hour ago, at one of our leading pawnbrokers' A man, answering the description you gave of the robber in every particular, entered just as they were closing, and requested a loan of £15 on the watch; they gave him ten, and he went away apparently satisfied.'

" 'That fact shows you he is in the town, does it not?' I observed. 'I trust you will not in any way relax your exertions.'

" 'Leave me alone, Sir,' he replied.

" 'Mind you are at the station to-morrow night, at the time our gentleman appointed,' I said; 'we may "spot" him with your assistance.'

" 'Not we, Sir. He won't be so foolish. He only said that as a blind.'

" 'I'm not so sure of that. I shall go to town by that train, at all events, just to make sure.'

"After some further conversation the inspector left me, and I sent a telegram to a friend in London for a supply of cash, with which his servant arrived the next day.

"On the morrow we heard nothing of Mr. Arthur Kenney; he kept out of the way. The presumption in the police mind was that he had gone to some other town.

"The hue and cry was raised after him all over the country. Being of a curious disposition, I determined to see if he would keep his word with me. Accordingly I went to the station to catch the half-past seven train, and looked eagerly around me, but there was no one to be seen who at all answered the description of my travelling companion.

"On arriving at London I waited on the platform for a few minutes, when an aged and decrepit man, hobbling on a stick, pestered me to buy a box of fuzees.

"To get rid of him, I gave him a penny and took a box of lights. A porter, coming up at the time, promptly ejected him, saying he wondered how he got in, as they did not allow beggars in the station.

"Ten minutes elapsed.

"Mr. Arthur Kenney was *non est*.

"Taking a cigar from my case, I put it in my mouth, bit the end off, and looked round for a light. The fuzees occurred to me. I drew the box from my pocket and opened it.

"A cry of disgust broke from me! It contained the voucher of my watch, which had been pawned in S——!

"'Hi! porter! stop that beggar! he is a thief in disguise!' I cried.

"But it was too late!

"The rascal had kept his word, and that was the last I ever saw of My Travelling Companion."

III.—THE GHOST IN THE TUNNEL.

THOMAS AGNEW was a ne'er-do-well fellow. He had been bound apprentice to a carpenter when quite a lad, but left his master to join a militia regiment; then he enlisted in the regular army, and getting heartily sick of that, he induced his friends by his prayers, entreaties, and promises, to buy his discharge.

This was a weighty matter to Thomas Agnew senior, who was nothing more than head porter at a railway station in a midland county. He had, however, by dint of perseverance

and self-denial saved a little money, with which he started his wife in a small shop, and, by the constant exercise of frugal habits, increased his capital in the savings bank.

Young Agnew came home much sobered by his experience of the life of a soldier. He had seen the inside of a guard-room too often to care about donning the scarlet again.

Employment offering again at a remunerative rate, it was hoped by his friends that he had sown his wild oats and would be steady for the future.

His father had the more hope that this would be the case, because his son paid a great deal of attention to a girl whom he had formerly courted with a more boyish love.

Martha or Patty Rowe was a pretty fragile creature, of no particular use in any way; as ornamental as a garden flower and of just as much utility. As a working man's wife she was entirely thrown away.

Yet it came to pass that the ne'er-do-well Thomas Agnew married Patty and took her home to a cottage, neatly furnished, for the expenses attending which his father had been security.

It soon became evident that the public-house had more charms for Thomas than his home, and his poor wife got sadly neglected in consequence.

This conduct on his part naturally led to reproaches on hers. He listened to her complaints with stolid apathy, and was generally worse behaved than before.

Every one remonstrated with him. The only answer they could get was, "If a man does a good day's work and earns his wages fairly, he has a right to do what he likes with them. I choose to spend some out of doors. If my wife doesn't like it, she can leave it, and go home again."

To reason with such a self-willed dunder-headed fellow was a waste of time.

He had his own way, and one day offended his employer, who immediately discharged him. His father having some interest on the line, got him into the engine works at Crewe as an extra hand, and he eventually became a stoker on the "Vulcan," an engine that went up to town and back again every other day with a goods train.

Seeing the necessity of sticking to something, Thomas Agnew behaved himself very creditably for some time, but a settled dislike to his wife seemed to have taken root in his mind.

He avoided his home as much as possible, and the poor woman declared that her life was a misery and a burden to her.

This being widely known, no one was surprised when it was reported one fine morning that Patty had left her husband's roof and gone no one knew whither. Thomas had been seen with her the night before, and some people had heard them quarrelling violently; for though Patty was calmness itself, she would occasionally "fire up" when her husband was guilty of any particularly outrageous conduct.

The police authorities of the nearest town thought the case of Patty's disappearance sufficiently suspicious to warrant the arrest of Agnew. He was accordingly brought up before a bench of magistrates and examined.

Several witnesses deposed to having heard them quarrelling.

One declared that he saw them in the neighbourhood of the Box Tunnel, which was near the village in which the Agnews resided.

This man, John Willow, said that Patty was sitting down on a heap of rubbish near the entrance of the tunnel, weeping, and that her husband was standing near her in a threatening attitude.

Agnew admitted all this, and added that his wife told him as they lived so unhappily together she should leave him.

He replied that she might do so, and he wished she would at once, as he was sick and tired of her.

Whereupon she said, "Tom, do you mean that?"

He replied, "By G— I do."

"What followed?" asked the chairman.

"She got up from the heap of rubbish upon which the last witness says he saw her sitting, and saying, 'Good-bye, Thomas; you'll be sorry for this some day, and regret me when I am gone,' walked away, and I saw her no more."

"She was not at home when you returned?" asked the magistrate.

"Please your worship," said a policeman, "the prisoner did not go home at all that night."

"Is that so?"

The prisoner nodded his head.

"How was that?" inquired the chairman.

"I went to the 'Cat and Fiddle' and got drunk," said Thomas Agnew.

"Where did you sleep?"

"On a bench in the tap-room."

"Did your unfortunate wife give you any idea as to what she intended to do?"

"She did not."

"Has anything been heard of the woman?"

"Nothing, Sir," answered the policeman who had charge of the case.

"Well," said the chairman, "the prisoner must be discharged. There is no evidence whatever at present before us to warrant us in detaining him. I have consulted with my brother magistrates and that is our unanimous opinion."

So Thomas Agnew was discharged from custody and resumed his duties on the railway. The people who knew him rather shunned him after his wife's disappearance. Her relations especially shunned him, for they imagined he knew more about Patty's whereabouts or Patty's fate than he chose to tell.

The man who drove the "Vulcan" was named James Glencairn. He was a Scotchman, and a man who had his "whimsies," and cherished them.

He had heard about the mysterious absence of Mrs. Agnew and the subsequent examination of Thomas, and he was prejudiced against him.

However, he could not avoid being in his society, because he was his stoker, and they were compelled to work together.

Scant civility did Agnew get from him. Treated with coldness by all the men he grew more sullen every day, and what is called a hang-dog expression settled on his face, which did not prepossess people in his favour. So surely is the face the index of the mind.

The Box Tunnel, as everybody knows, is an extraordinary engineering work. Its length is very great, and to a nervous man it would be extremely likely to suggest supernatural fancies.

However that may be, I am about to relate an extraordinary occurrence which took place the first time the goods train ran through the Box Tunnel.

Glencairn was driving a train consisting of twenty waggons laden with various articles of merchandise. One guard was in charge in a break van at the end of the train. Tom Agnew, as usual, was sullen and silent.

As they were about to enter the tunnel, Glencairn opened the furnace door and stirred the fire, which emitted a fierce heat and a vivid glow.

Agnew gave the door a kick, saying, "Keep it shut, can't you, mate? It's hot enough."

This was true, for it was the end of August.

"I want a light; and if I want it I can have it, I suppose," answered Glencairn, gruffly.

"If that's all you may have as much fire as you like, and go to blazes for it," said Tom Agnew.

The train now entered the tunnel and the glare from the fire rendered the dark slimy walls distinctly visible.

Glencairn noticed that Agnew looked shudderingly at a small alcove on the left hand side. But what astonished him most was that as they passed this alcove the form of a woman, not until then noticeable, stood forward and extended an arm stained with blood.

She was dressed in the ordinary garb of a woman in the lower ranks of life. Her dress was spotted with mud and blood, and she seemed to have been subjected to rough treatment during a violent struggle.

Round her throat was a bright red mark, to which she pointed with one hand, while the other was apparently held forth in denunciation of some one.

The train was going at a great speed. The glance the men obtained of this phantom was but momentary, but the impression it left upon both of them was so intense and vivid that they could not get it out of their eyes for some time.

Glencairn was the first to recover himself. He looked at Tom, who was huddled up on some coke, like one stupified.

"Come! rouse up my man," he exclaimed.

At the sound of his voice Agnew staggered to his feet, rubbed his eyes as if dazed, and said, "Did you see it?"

His voice was scarcely audible amidst the noise made by the train in the tunnel, which somewhat resembled successive discharges of musketry.

But Glencairn caught the words and answered, "I did."

No more was said until they got into the open air again.

Agnew breathed more freely. The scared look vanished from his face and he looked boldly, not to say defiantly, at Glencairn.

"That's a rummy go, mate," he said, with a laugh which seemed to Glencairn to be forced and unnatural.

"As rummy a one as ever I see, and I'll tell you one thing."

"What?"

"It's one as I don't want to see again this side of Christmas or the other," replied Glencairn.

"What could it have been? our fancy?"

"Our fancy be——" Glencairn corrected himself, and pulling up sharp, went on. "No, it wasn't fancy."

"Something got up for a lark, eh?"

"Who by?"

This question puzzled Agnew, who rejoined, "Do you mean to say that you think it was a—a ghost?"

"There are some things, my friend," replied the Scotchman, "that our minds won't let us understand. Ghosts is one of those things. I aint half easy about that figure in the tunnel. Wait till we go through again, and when I get to town I'll ask the driver of the express and the parly whether they saw anything out of the common."

"But——"

"Let it drop, will you? I don't like it, and it's one of those things that won't bear talking about."

"Why," said Agnew, tauntingly, "any one would think you was afraid."

"Perhaps I am," was the steady response.

"Some would say you'd done something wrong."

"Such as——"

"Well, I don't know exactly. Committed a murder or something of that sort, perhaps."

"Thomas Agnew," exclaimed James Glencairn, "listen here. It wasn't my wife who disappeared mysteriously, and under what folks call suspicious circumstances."

Agnew turned as white as a sheet. Great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, and he held on by the rail of the engine to steady himself.

"It's very plucky of you to sneer at me, isn't it?" he said in a whining voice. "Very plucky, when you can't prove nothing, and know I am under a cloud. Why I loved the woman better than my life, and would give worlds if—if I could recall the past."

"I believe you, Thomas Agnew; as God's my witness I believe you," answered the engine driver solemnly.

Agnew said but little more till they got to the end of their journey. The driver was what he called "dead set" against him, and he did not like the ambiguity of his last remark, at which, however, he could not very well take offence.

In town Glencairn went to a house of call for engine drivers and met the driver of the Scotch mail, which had preceded the goods train.

"Did you see anything peculiar on entering the Box Tunnel?" he asked.

"Nothing that I know of," was the reply.

"You didn't?"

"No! why?"

"Oh! my mate fancied he saw a ghost, that's all."

"Go on," said the driver of the Scotch mail, dubiously. "I can't swallow that. Come and have a glass, and don't try any of those games on with me. We're Nineteenth Centuries, we are, and don't live in the time of the Crusades."

Having gained his point—that is to say, having ascertained that the ghost had not favoured the preceding train to his own with an apparition, Glencairn was content to let the matter drop, and pass it over as a joke.

That night Agnew got very much intoxicated, which was a practice of his when upset. The next day he was awfully nervous and shaky, and scarcely fit for his duty.

"You're not quite yourself to-day," said Glencairn.

"I passed muster, so it's no business of yours," was the surly answer.

By passing muster he meant that he had passed by an inspector without being found fault with, an ordeal every man has to undergo before he gets on an engine.

"That's true enough," replied Glencairn; "I wasn't finding fault; I only meant it kindly."

"I shouldn't care if it wasn't for that infernal tunnel," said Agnew, as the sweat once more gathered on his brow, and he swept it away with the back of his hand in big drops.

The tunnel was reached in due course, and it is no exaggeration to say that the hearts of both men beat the quicker.

They had to enter at the other end this time, and consequently did not expect to meet the ghost until their exit.

To their infinite satisfaction, no spiritual manifestation was made.

"Why," cried Glencairn, "**it** didn't come. We may have been mistaken after all."

He looked round for Agnew.

The man was sitting down, with his hands clasping his knees and shedding tears copiously. He had evidently nerved himself for a great ordeal, and the reaction overcame him.

When he recovered himself, Agnew laid his hand upon Glencairn's arm and said, almost beseechingly, "We're getting near home. You won't say anything about this—this ghost or whatever it is, will you? It might do me harm. I don't know why; but it might. I've been an unlucky devil, and the neighbours are against me."

"I won't say anything," answered Glencairn.

"You won't? Thank you for that. I'll be a friend to you some day, mate. Some day when you may'nt expect it."

He held out his hand as if to grasp Glencairn; but the engine

driver pretended not to see the action, and would not grasp his hand in a friendly grip.

Inwardly annoyed at this mark of negative hostility, but externally indifferent, Agnew went on coaling the engine, and appeared wrapt up in his work.

The two men presented a great contrast.

Glencairn was a strongly-built massive looking Scotchman, with a hard dry face begrimed with dirt and a greasy hand which was guiltless of soap and water. But his face gleamed with a cheery and honest instinct which was wanting in that of Agnew.

"We're late," said Glencairn, looking at his watch. "I'll put more steam on. I think old Vulcan will bear it. What says the gauge?"

He consulted the gauge to see what pressure of steam they already had on, and found it would bear a little more.

The Vulcan flew along over the polished metals, and arrived at an intermediate station just in time to be shunted to make room for a passenger train.

On the ensuing day Agnew presented himself at the engine shed looking very worn and haggard.

He had been drinking, and keeping late hours again. His hand shook, and his eyes were bleared and bloodshot.

When they started, he said, "Now for the ghost," and laughed wildly.

"Never jest about things you don't understand," answered Glencairn.

"Oh! I'm ready for it. I was a d— fool last time, but now I could face a regiment of them."

"You'd get tired of that fun before you had gone by the first company," said the engine driver.

As they neared the tunnel Agnew became a little less boastful. He spoke seldom and left off swearing, which was a relief to Glencairn, who was a Presbyterian and a kirk goer.

"Now for it," exclaimed Glencairn, as he partially shut off the steam on nearing the tunnel.

Agnew set his teeth firmly together.

"Throw a little light on the scene as you did before, so that there may be no mistake about it," he said.

"Right you are," was the reply.

The next moment a glare of light rushed out, blinding in its effulgency. They were in the tunnel.

Standing in the alcove was the same weird figure; but not content with threatening, it this time stepped boldly on to the engine, to the dismay of those who were in charge of it.

Agnew was completely overwhelmed. He fell insensible at the feet of the spectre, and would have fallen off on to the metals if Glencairn had not placed him in a more secure position.

As he fell he cried in a terrified voice, "Great God ! my wife ! Oh ! mercy."

Glencairn stared at the spectre, and treasured up in his mind what had fallen from Agnew.

With a shovel he made two or three lunges at the spirit to test its ghostly origin, but he encountered no resistance. It was but thin air, and yet the dress, the face, the blood, were all so natural that the man was almost as much astounded as his companion.

The ghastly face of the woman haunted the man for years after. He could not bear to think of that awful ride through the tunnel with what he always averred was a denizen of the other world by his side.

When they got into the grey light, which heralded their return to the outer world, the ghost vanished as mysteriously as it had come.

The engine driver murmured a prayer of thanksgiving, and a sort of *retro satanas*, after which he felt considerably better.

Agnew remained insensible for a long time ; when he came to himself the first questions he asked were, "It came again, didn't it ? What did I say ? Have I been ill long ? Where is it now ?"

"It did come. You said nothing. Not very. I don't know," answered the driver in his practical Scotch way, replying to the queries *seriatim*.

Agnew was extremely uneasy during the remainder of the journey, and towards its termination he said, "I think I shall cut this sort of life. I can't stand it. I'd rather go down to Charles Street, Westminster, and 'list for the line."

"You'd soon get tired of it."

"Not I. I'd go into my old regiment. Anything's better than this."

Glencairn said nothing to alarm him in any way, or urge him to precipitate flight ; he rather tried to soothe him, and in so doing he had an object in view.

As soon as he could slip away from the engine shed he sought the office of the traffic manager.

"Well, my man," exclaimed the manager. "What is it ?"

"I come on curious business, Sir, but if you will hear me out——"

"Yes, yes. Fire away," replied the manager, pointing to a chair, and taking one himself.

Glencairn mentioned Agnew's antecedents as far as he knew them, spoke of the disappearance of his wife, and dwelt at length on the singular apparitions which he had witnessed, and the agitation displayed by Agnew.

"Strange enough," said the traffic manager, thoughtfully. "What do you want me to do in the matter?"

"I thought, Sir, if you would authorise a search in that alcove, something might be found, and if it should be a human body, why the sooner it is at rest the better."

"Anything else?"

"An engine sent down special——"

"Would cost the company something, but no matter. It shall be done, and you shall drive the engine, while I and a detective police officer with whom I am acquainted will accompany you. The line will be clear about five o'clock in the morning; you be at the departure platform with your engine at that time."

"Yes, Sir," answered Glencairn.

He was there with his engine to a minute.

Two figures wrapped in great coats stepped forward and mounted the engine. They were the traffic manager and the detective.

The run down was made quickly, and the manager, who had been a driver himself once, assisted Glencairn to work the engine, all the while questioning him as to the apparition and the state of mind of Agnew, for the benefit of the detective.

"I am afraid," he said at last, "that we are on the eve of some terrible discovery."

"If a crime has been committed, the way in which we are enabled to find it out is most extraordinary," said the detective.

"So much so as to be little short of miraculous."

When they reached the tunnel they slackened speed and brought the engine to a stand-still, close by the mysterious slit in the wall which Glencairn had called an alcove.

It had been made to enable any one working in the tunnel to step inside, and avoid a passing train. Its dimensions were sufficiently large to admit say half a dozen men; for as navvies generally work in gangs of four or six or more, it would not have been of much use if its size was circumscribed.

The opening was about two feet from the ground, and the traffic manager stepped from the engine on to the stone coping, followed by the detective.

Both had lighted lamps with strong reflectors, which cast such a blaze of light around the little brick built box that not an angle remained in shadow.

The detective uttered a cry.

At his feet lay the body of a woman in an advanced state of decomposition, but though her features were discoloured and swollen they were still defined, and susceptible of recognition.

"A body," he exclaimed, "and a woman by the dress. There has been a foul murder."

"Our best course will be to leave it," said the manager, "and let the local police deal with it. Poor creature," he added, "It has been a pretty face, and the hair is like floss silk."

"Yes," answered the detective, getting on the engine once more. "That will be our best course. The crime has been committed by some one well acquainted with the tunnel. Who so likely to have noticed this alcove as an engine driver? I shall feel myself justified in telegraphing to London to order the immediate arrest of this Agnew."

"By all means. What should you say was the cause of death?"

"Did the gash in the throat escape you? It was evident enough to me that the man had cut her throat in the tunnel, and then dragged the body into this hole," replied the detective.

"And the ghost?"

"Oh! that's beyond me," he said, shaking his head.

The local police were informed of the discovery, and the body was brought into the town on a stretcher. The excitement was great. Every one recognised Patty Agnew. The friends of the unfortunate deceased were frantic with rage. As for old Agnew, he was simply bowed down, and prostrated with grief.

The report of the apparition made a deep sensation throughout the country, and when Agnew was brought up handcuffed to take his trial, he was greeted with yells of execration from a tumultuous mob.

The wretched man in a fit of remorse confessed his guilt, and suffered the extreme penalty of the law in front of the county gaol, in the presence of a greater number of spectators than had ever been assembled there before upon a similar occasion.

IV.—THE LOUDWATER CATASTROPHE.

It was a bitterly cold night in the month of January. The ground was covered with a winding sheet of snow. A biting east wind tore through the dimly lighted streets, and dashed the frozen particles of snow in the faces of the pedestrians.

A lady and gentleman turned out of the Strand and walked down Norfolk Street. They were both young, the lady especially so. Their dress, which was costly and elegant, as well as their manner, denoted that they belonged to the higher ranks of society.

"Have we much further to go, dear Harry?" asked the lady, shivering, and looking up anxiously and lovingly in his face, through her veil.

"I hope not," replied her companion. "I have always heard that there were plenty of lodgings to be had in these streets running out of the Strand."

"Shall I be left all alone?"

"Yes, that is inevitable. Remember I am your brother. Do not forget that."

"Fear nothing from my indiscretion. I have learnt my lesson well," replied the young lady.

"Dear Blanche," exclaimed the gentleman, returning the fond pressure of the hand she gave him.

The clock of St. Clement Danes struck the hour of six. The light of a street lamp enabled the gentleman to see a card displayed in a window; on it was written *Furnished Apartments*.

"This will do, I think. It looks a decent place. What do you say, pet?" he enquired.

"Any place will do for me. I am so tired, and so cold. I long for a fire to warm myself by," replied Blanche in a querulous treble.

Knocking at the door, the gentleman waited until it was opened by a woman of middle age, with corkscrew curls and ferrety eyes. "Apartments, Sir?" she said in a harsh unpleasant voice. "Yes. I have a drawing-room floor, and likewise two parlours."

"They will do, I dare say. Let us look at them, please."

The landlady, whose name was Mrs. Bodle, showed the applicants over her parlours, two neatly furnished, snug looking rooms, and demanded thirty shillings a week for the use of them.

"I will take them on those terms," exclaimed the gentleman.

"For yourself?" asked Mrs. Bodle.

"No; for this young lady, who is my sister. She has come from the country to-day, and was going to stay with some friends, but a sudden death in the family—you see."

"Well, Sir, you will be prepared with references, I suppose. When will you want the rooms?"

"A dozen references to-morrow, if you like; for the present my card and this five pound note will, I hope, be sufficient for you. The rooms will be required to-night; at once, I may say."

"To-night!" ejaculated Mrs. Bodle.

"Yes, my good woman; so stir yourself and light a fire. My sister will want something for her supper—a chop or——"

"Very well, Sir. Her wants shall be attended to," said Mrs. Bodle, mollified by the sight of the money. Looking at his card, she added, "Mr. Harry Prescott, is it not, Sir?"

"Yes."

"Excuse me, Sir, but there is no address."

"Is there not? then there ought to be. I will supply the omission before I go. But for goodness' sake light a fire; we shall be frozen to death else."

Mrs. Bodle raised no further objections. Her apartments had been empty for more than a month, and she had not saved much money towards her quarter's rent, so she could not afford to be scrupulous. Mr. Prescott looked a man who would be generous if he was well treated, and visions of long extortionate but undisputed bills floated before her in delicious prospective.

While Mrs. Bodle is bustling about, and making her apartments habitable, we will throw a little light upon the lady and gentleman whom we have unceremoniously introduced to the society of the reader.

Miss Blanche Onslow was the daughter of a gentleman of fortune, residing in Suffolk. The young lady being of a romantic disposition, fell in love at the early age of seventeen with her cousin, Mr. Harry Prescott.

This gentleman was an orphan, and had the slender income of three hundred a year to live upon. He was in very good society, much liked, but terribly in debt, and to crown his folly he fell as much in love with his cousin as she did with him.

An uncle of Miss Onslow's had left her a fortune of three thousand a year, which she was to enjoy when she came of age.

To prevent his daughter from throwing herself and her fortune away upon some fellow totally unworthy of her confidence, Mr. Onslow made her a ward in chancery.

Fearing that her *penchant* for her cousin, Harry Prescott, which she openly displayed, would result in a serious love attack, Mr. Onslow determined to marry her to a friend of his, a Mr. Graves, a London merchant, who had just bought a large estate in the immediate vicinity of Mr. Onslow's own property.

Mr. Graves was an ugly old man turned fifty, coarse in his manner and proud of his money, all of which he had made himself by a life of hard work, indefatigable energy and self denial.

Blanche was no sooner made cognizant of her father's intention to unite her in wedlock to Mr. Graves, than she formed a sudden resolve and put it into execution at once.

She knew that her Cousin Harry had rooms in Duke Street, St. James's. She would call upon him and implore his protection, confess her love and leave herself in his hands.

Arriving in London after her clandestine departure from home, she was lucky enough to find Mr. Prescott at home.

He listened attentively to her and shook his head sadly, telling her that if he married her without the consent of her father, he would be acting in contempt of the Court of Chancery, and probably suffer a long imprisonment.

All he could do would be to take her home again.

This she would not listen to, and the effect of her tears and entreaties was what we have seen. He took her a lodging in Norfolk Street, and promised to see what could be done to get her out of the dilemma in which she had placed herself, and to prevent her marriage with Mr. Graves taking place.

The fact was, Blanche's unexpected arrival in town had placed Harry Prescott in the most uncomfortable position.

Although he loved the girl fondly and truly, he felt like the man who had a white elephant given him as a present. He did not know what to do with his elephant, and Harry did not know what to do with Blanche. Of course she was perfectly safe in his hands. He would rather have cut off his right hand than have wronged her in any way.

She implored him not to send her back to her father; and being in doubt as to the best course to pursue, he placed her under Mrs. Bodle's roof and trusted to chance for a speedy solution of his difficulty.

A good fire diffused its heat and light through the apartment, and when Blanche had taken off her bonnet and shawl,

and eaten a mutton chop, she felt so happy, that she threw her arms round Harry's neck and kissed him tenderly.

"I don't regret one bit having run away from home," she exclaimed. "You are so kind to me, Harry. But I knew you would be before I started."

"You know I look upon you as my little wife, darling," answered Harry. "You can't always be a minor, and if you don't change your mind before you are one and twenty——"

"Change my mind!—oh! Harry," said the little beauty reproachfully, as her eyes filled with tears.

"I did not mean it."

"Will you change yours?" she asked in her turn.

"If I do, may——"

"Don't swear, Harry dear," interposed Blanche, smiling. "Rather give me some token of your love."

"What shall I give you?" he asked.

"That diamond ring you wear round your necktie, if you can spare it. Put it on my engaged finger, and then I shall know that you will always be mine, heart and soul."

Mr. Prescott did as she requested him, and the beautiful stone was soon glittering upon that particular digit she had spoken of as her engaged finger.

"Now, dearest," she exclaimed, triumphantly, "I know that you love me, and that you are mine for ever."

Soon afterwards he took his leave, promising to come early in the morning and talk matters over, so as to see what ought to be done for the best."

Mrs. Bodle's curiosity was greatly excited. She could not believe that Blanche was Mr. Prescott's sister; they seemed too affectionate for brother and sister, and she determined to watch and see if she could not find out the secret.

Several days elapsed, and Prescott was just as much embarrassed as ever. The white elephant hung on his hands, and there was every prospect of its doing so.

At last Mrs. Bodle could restrain herself no longer.

She had entered the parlour to clear away the breakfast things, and seeing Blanche looking out of the window, she exclaimed, "I ask your pardon, Miss, but I should like to know whether I am to address you as Miss or Mum?"

"What on earth do you mean?" replied Blanche. "Did not Mr. Prescott tell you we were brother and sister?"

"If that's the case, Miss, how is it that your pocket handkerchief's marked 'Miss Onslow?'" said Mrs. Bodle, while her eyes twinkled with malicious cunning.

Blanche had totally forgotten that her handkerchief was marked with her name. She had been unable to bring any portion of her wardrobe with her from Suffolk, and Harry had supplied her with money, to purchase what she wanted for her immediate necessities.

With a tell-tale blush she replied, "That handkerchief belongs to a friend of mine; and if it belonged to me," she added boldly, "I really don't see what business it is of yours to interfere. You let your rooms, and you get paid for them."

"Very true, Miss. I do; but as I've got a character and a conscience I must be particular."

"What has your conscience to do with it?"

"Everything, Miss," replied Mrs. Bodle. "I've been a mother myself, and I know what it is to have a disobedient daughter, but as she sleeps in her grave, poor thing, being punished for her sin, she shall rest in peace for aught I'll say against her. My Mary Ann told me with her dying breath: 'Mother,' she says, and these were her very words, 'mother, if I had any one to tell me right I shouldn't have gone wrong.' Now, Miss, don't be offended where no offence is meant. Perhaps you haven't a soul to tell you right, and you may go wrong if you aint told."

"You are a very impertinent old woman, and I beg you will go away," exclaimed Blanche, with rising colour.

"As to that, we shall all be old some day," retorted Mrs. Bodle.

"Will you go?"

"Not till I've said my say. I shouldn't sleep easy in my bed this night if I didn't try and bring you to the right. Perhaps you've a father or a mother, perhaps both. Perhaps you've run away from your home. Think of the agony you're causing them as brought you into the world, and as nourished you since you've been in it. You're young, and want advice. Now my dear young lady, tell me all. I'll go to your father and make your peace with him."

Blanche said nothing, but stamped her foot impatiently upon the carpet.

"Fancy them at this moment weeping as only old people can weep over the wickedness of their children," continued Mrs. Bodle.

"Go away, do, please. You don't know anything about my affairs, and I don't wish you to," said Blanche.

"Of all the 'ardened young 'ussies," muttered Mrs. Bodle

adding aloud, "you'll not be offended with me, Miss, I hope, for doing of what I considered my duty."

"I'll forgive you anything if you will only go and leave me alone," replied Blanche.

She took up the advertisement sheet of the morning paper which lay upon the table and cast her eye over its columns, as a broad hint to Mrs. Bodle that she wished to be alone.

Suddenly she uttered a cry, started, and threw down the paper, in vain endeavouring to hide her confusion from her sharp sighted landlady.

"There's something she's seen in that paper," thought Mrs. Bodle. "Perhaps her old father—poor dear—has been a advertising of her, and she's seen the description of herself and is afraid I shall see it. Wait a bit; my time's coming."

Removing the breakfast things, Mrs. Bodle sent her servant out to buy another copy of the paper, and running her eye over the 'personals,' as the Americans call them, saw, "To lodging house keepers and others. Left her home, on the 2nd inst., a young lady who answers the following description. Medium height, slim and delicately made, very fair, light blue eyes, *retroussé* nose, small mouth, hands, and feet. Was dressed in black silk, with velvet mantle to match; had grebe muff, cuffs and victorine, lavender gloves, and bronze kid boots. Whoever will send any information to Mr. P., Private Enquiry Office, — Square, W.C., will receive a reward of ten pounds."

"That'll do," exclaimed Mrs. Bodle. "Susan!"

The maid of all work made her appearance.

"Business calls me out. Keep a eye on the parlours, and when the second floor goes out help yourself to tea and sugar, likewise coffee; we're run short."

"Yes, Mum," replied Susan.

Hastily dressing herself, Mrs. Bodle went into the Strand and hailed an omnibus which was travelling in the direction she wanted to go.

On arriving at the Private Enquiry Office she was shown into Mr. P.'s room, and at once communicated her business.

"Your name and address, please," said Mr. P.

"Give me my ten pounds first," she answered.

"Not at all. How do I know that your story is not trumped up, or that you are not mistaken? I shall do nothing of the sort," was the decided answer.

At this moment a clerk announced Mr. Onslow.

"That's 'im," ejaculated Mrs. Bodle.

"Well, P., any news?" asked an old gentleman, upon whose

face harassment and worry seemed to have been making recent inroads.

"Yes, Sir ; there's plenty of news. Your young lady's in my house, and no 'arm's come to her," exclaimed Mrs. Bodle.

"In your house !" replied Mr. Onslow. "Call a cab ; let us go at once, and bring the misguided girl to her senses and her home."

"Stop a bit ; I've got my bargain to make first," said Mrs. Bodle. "They've engaged my rooms for one month certain, with a week's notice, and if you take the young lady away, I shall not get what's mine by rights."

"How much does this woman want ?" asked Mr. Onslow, impatiently.

"Well, Sir," she answered. "There's ten pounds, that's my reward. Then there's five pounds a week for board and lodging, say for one month, and something for sundries. Say five and thirty pounds, and I'm agreeable."

"Write her a cheque, and cross it," said Mr. Onslow ; "if her story is untrue we can stop it. And now, Ma'am, the cab waits. Perhaps you will pardon my impatience to be conducted to my daughter ?"

"Of course I will, Sir. It's only nat'ral, and I should have a 'art 'arder than any stone if I did not feel for you dreadful."

Taking her by the arm he drew her through the office and into the street. Mr. P. followed with the cheque, which she snatched eagerly from him. "Take it, you old harpy," he exclaimed.

"Arpy ! who are you calling a 'arpy ?" she replied indignantly. "'Arpy yourself."

But Mr. Onslow pushed her into the cab, and cut short her garrulity. He asked few questions during the journey, and when they arrived, pushed past Mrs. Bodle into the parlour, where he found Mr. Harry Prescott and his daughter.

Imagine the consternation of Blanche. I believe Harry was rather glad than otherwise that Mr. Onslow had come. It cut short the Gordian knot of their difficulty.

"Leave the room," said Mr. Onslow to Mrs. Bodle.

• The request was complied with grumblingly.

"Now, Sir, the explanation of this, if you please," said Mr. Onslow, folding his arms and looking sternly at Harry Prescott.

"Of what do you speak ?" he replied.

"What am I to expect ? Is this girl still daughter of mine, or am I to discard her for ever ?"

"I must refer you to the young lady herself for an explanation. I have acted purely in the place of a brother to her since Miss Onslow's arrival in town."

"Speak," exclaimed her father, addressing Blanche.

"My dear papa," said Blanche, hanging back a little, her face the colour of a peony. "I am to blame, I admit that. But your threat of marrying me to that odious Mr. Graves brought me up to town, and I threw myself on the protection of Cousin Harry."

"And he brought you here?"

"He did. I have to thank him very much for his constant kindness. I fear I have embarrassed him sadly. He wanted to send me back to you, but I refused to go."

"I am glad it is no worse," answered Mr. Onslow. "You are a bad disobedient girl, and I shall show my sense of displeasure at your conduct at another and more fitting time. It will not be my fault if I do not cure you of a passion for romantic journeys to London."

"I hope you acquit me of any complicity in Miss Onslow's escape, Sir?" exclaimed Harry.

"Your duty was plain," was the reply. "When the girl came to you, you should have telegraphed to me."

"You will at least give me credit for my conduct during her stay in town?"

"How could you as a man of honour and a gentleman, which I believe you are, have acted differently to a ward in chancery?"

Harry bit his lip.

"Come, Miss, prepare to return with me," continued Mr. Onslow.

Blanche cast an appealing glance at her lover, but he being powerless to help her, merely shrugged his shoulders.

Heaving a deep sigh, she put on her bonnet and mantle, and said, "I am ready."

As she passed Harry and shook hands with him, she whispered, "I will write often, depend upon that."

The cab that had brought Mr. Onslow from the Private Enquiry Office took him and his daughter to his hotel, and from thence to the railway station.

Mr. Onslow before starting despatched a telegram which Blanche had reason to believe was intended for Mr. Graves. At all events, when they arrived at Onslow Hall they found that gentleman awaiting their arrival.

"You have brought the lost sheep back, I perceive," was his exclamation.

"Thank God ! yes," replied Mr. Onslow.

"In what light are we to regard her ? Not as a black sheep, I hope ? "

"White as the driven snow."

"My dear young lady, allow me to congratulate you on your escape from the many perils of the great metropolis," exclaimed Mr. Graves, endeavouring to grasp her hand.

She snatched it away from him, and ran up stairs to her own apartments. She did not appear at dinner that evening, pleading illness as an excuse, and indeed she was far from well. The excitement under which she had laboured during her stay in Norfolk Street was followed by a reaction which prostrated her, and she found consolation in copious floods of tears.

When Mr. Onslow and Mr. Graves sat hob-nobbing over their wine the latter enquired the particulars of Blanche's capture.

Mr. Onslow gratified his curiosity and added, "The fact is, Graves, we must settle the girl somehow. She is mad after that scamp of a cousin of hers, and if he were not afraid of the Court of Chancery, he would have married her before now."

"Can't we get the Chancellor's consent to my marriage with the young lady ? " said Graves.

"I have no doubt of it, when your application will be backed up with my consent."

"I took a fancy to her the first moment I saw her," continued the manufacturer, and as our estates adjoin, it will be a capital thing for my son and heir to inherit such a magnificent property as the two together will make."

"She is yours, my friend," replied Mr. Onslow. "I will compel her to consent to the union, and you must make her love you afterwards."

"Love me ! ha ! ha !" laughed Mr. Graves. "It matters little whether she does or not. Her common sense will come to her rescue after a bit. I believe more misery has been produced by love matches, than the most far seeing amongst us imagine."

The result of this after dinner conversation was soon notified to Blanche.

She was told that in a fortnight's time she must hold herself in readiness to marry Mr. Graves.

"You no doubt," said her father, "accuse me of tyranny now, but hereafter you will be prepared to admit that I have acted as your best friend should have acted. Good Heaven ! is it nothing to prevent a girl from throwing herself

away upon a penniless fellow, whose reputation and character will not bear the strictest investigation !”

“I do not want to marry anyone,” replied Blanche. “If you loved me as you say you do you would let me remain single.”

“I cannot do that. You are so flighty and self-willed that I must have you taken care of, and looked after. Where can I find a better person than Mr. Graves, who is a most estimable person ? True, he is the architect of his own fortune, but the fortune is a prodigious one, and our family is sufficiently ancient and good to compensate for his want of a crest and armorial bearings.”

Mr. Onslow would listen to no refusal, and left Blanche dissolved in tears. Her only hope was in Harry. Sitting down at her desk she wrote him a brief and hurried letter, informing him of the imminent peril in which she stood, and imploring him to come to her rescue if he did not wish to see her dead, as she would compass her own destruction sooner than find herself the wife of such a man, for whom her hatred and despal were too great for words.

This communication set Harry Prescott’s brain in a whirl. Only a few days had to elapse before his Blanche’s marriage with a man she detested.

He at once went down into Suffolk, but his presence in the neighbourhood being detected Blanche was more closely guarded than ever, and he found it a matter of impossibility to see her or even communicate his presence in the neighbourhood.

The town of Loudwater was the nearest to Onslow Hall, and at an inn there Harry took up his abode.

But two days had to elapse. The day appointed for the marriage was drawing positively near.

He was at his wits’ end ; and that was a long journey, for he was a clever fellow, and a man of many devices.

While sitting in the coffee room of his inn a hand was laid lightly on his shoulder, and a friendly voice exclaimed, “Harry, old fellow, what on earth are you doing here ?”

He looked up, and beheld an old schoolfellow whom he had been very friendly with while at Eton.

“I am nearly frantic,” he replied.

“Are you hiding from hungry creditors ?”

“No, indeed. My wolves are not yet so ravenous as to banish me from the festive scene, but a girl I love more than life itself is to be married the day after to-morrow to a rich manufacturer.”

“Whom she likes better than you ?”

"No, Mason. If she preferred him I should not mind so much, but the little darling is devoted to me. There is not a pulse in her body that does not throb for me."

"It's a hard case," said Mason reflectively.

"Can you suggest no way out of the difficulty? If not, a fig for your sympathy."

"Don't lose your temper. I am thinking. Let us have a bottle of wine and some cigars, they are good helps to cogitation."

Harry rang the bell violently. The waiter soon placed on the table some hock and cigars; lighting one, Mason crossed his legs and exclaimed, "Look here, old boy. I have an idea, and as it is a rare occurrence with me I hope you will appreciate it at its true value."

"Let me hear it first," answered Harry.

"I am going to town to-morrow, and I think I can extricate you from your difficulty."

"In what way?"

"You want to prevent the marriage?"

"Yes."

"How can that be done more effectually than by removing the bridegroom?"

"You talk in riddles!" exclaimed Harry Prescott, almost angrily. "How can the man be removed? The idea's absurd."

"Not so absurd either as you seem to imagine, you dear impatient old thing. He is a filthy lucre hunter—a money grubber, didn't you say?"

"He calls himself James Graves, merchant of the City of London."

"That will do. Now, 'Where the treasure is there will the heart be also.'"

Harry groaned at his friend's prolixity.

"Don't gnash your teeth. I'm coming to the point directly," said Mason, with provoking coolness. "It's wrong to hurry any man's cattle."

"What will you do?"

"Send him a telegram to-morrow, that's what I'll do."

"To what effect?"

"Where does he bank?"

"London and Westminster, I believe."

"Well! I'll tell him in the telegram that the shares have been depreciated fifteen per cent. If that does not bring him up with a run I don't know what will."

Harry Prescott jumped up and shook his friend heartily by the hand.

"You have solved the difficulty I verily believe," he exclaimed. "But you can't keep him in London always. Can't you put him in a sack and pitch him into the Thames?"

Mason laughed.

"That would not do, we should have Messieurs the Police about our ears. No. The merchant's absence will be your opportunity."

"I don't see it."

"But I do. You must carry the girl off when the coast's clear," explained Mason.

"When it is," replied Prescott dismally.

"Come, cheer up. Faint heart—you know——"

"I can't help it, Bob, old friend; you have known me all my life, I may say, and you have never before seen me show the white feather."

"Never; and the feather will soon change its snowy hue. Empty your glass and fill it again."

"I'll try it, Mason," said Prescott, recovering his lost spirits. "I can but make the venture and fail. You send some startling telegram and take the old fellow to London, and I'll run off with the girl."

Prescott saw his friend off to town the next day. Then he walked over to Onslow Hall and hung about the neighbourhood. A groom was in his pay and stole out to meet him every now and then, bringing him the latest news.

The man was called Jabez.

Harry Prescott had selected a capital situation as his hiding place.

Beneath an elm tree, now denuded of its leaves by the icy winter, was more than half a haystack. It had been cut into by the grooms, but what was left of it afforded an excellent shelter from the wintry winds.

Harry, by pulling some hay out of the stack here and there, made himself a nest that a dormouse would have envied in miniature, and curled himself up while waiting for Jabez.

I am sorry to say that he indulged in a rather dangerous habit, that is to say dangerous when the nature of the place in which he was lying hid be taken into consideration.

Being an inveterate smoker he could not resist the temptation of lighting his pipe. Jabez came up just as he had replenished the bowl for the second time.

"Well, what news?" he eagerly demanded.

"The old gent's gone to town, Sir, full pelt," replied the groom; "a telegram came down and off he hooked it like

smoke, and Miss Onslow she said she'd be glad to see you at the old place at dusk."

"The old place?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Thank you. Take this as an earnest of my good-will. I will be there. Do not hang about here any longer; you may excite suspicion. Go, my good fellow, and take my thanks with you," exclaimed Harry.

About three hours had to elapse before dusk, and he fell into a dreamy mood over his pipe. His eyes closed and he thought of Blanche and of happiness.

The pipe fell from his mouth and rolled amongst the hay, some lighted tobacco came in contact with a crisp tuft and soon a thick smoke arose.

This presently developed into a flame, which spread with alarming rapidity.

A sense of suffocation overcame Harry, and he woke up battling furiously against a dense volume of smoke, and quick darting tongues of flame.

Beating a retreat before he had suffered any personal injury, he stood still with folded arms and surveyed the burning rick.

To attempt to extinguish the flames without water would have been worse than madness. He felt angry with himself for being so foolish as to give rise to an occurrence which would soon rouse the neighbourhood.

While condemning himself the cries of men hurriedly advancing to the scene of conflagration were heard.

As these sounds were borne towards him on the freshening breeze he thought it advisable to beat a speedy retreat.

But though he made a circuit to avoid the approaching throng, he was so unfortunate as to rush right into the arms of Mr. Onslow, who came out of a wicket leading from an orchard.

"Prescott!" he ejaculated.

Harry held out his hand but the other would not touch it.

"No, no. Why have recourse to hypocrisy?" said the father of Blanche. "There is a feud between us, let it so remain."

"As you like," answered Harry carelessly.

"But I have a right before we part to ask what you are doing on my property."

"I have been told there is a bridle path through these fields."

"What then?"

"I am a simple traveller, and not a trespasser. Good-morning."

Mr. Onslow stared after the proud yet dignified figure of the young man, as it retreated in the distance.

"He claims the right of way possessed by the public," murmured Mr. Onslow. "He is right in his law. I cannot touch him for walking across these fields, but I must have him watched. And now to the fire."

Fortunately for Harry, the fire proved one of such magnitude that it could not be extinguished for some hours, and then the greater part of the rick was consumed.

This enabled him to enter the garden attached to the Hall, and make for the trysting spot Blanche had fixed upon for their interview; for the men about the place were so fully occupied in subduing the fire that the house and grounds were almost deserted.

He had some time to wait before the hour he had appointed arrived; but it so happened that Blanche's impatience to meet her lover induced her to go to the spot a full hour before the time, hoping that he might be similarly anxious.

"Oh, my darling!" she exclaimed, as she fell into his arms. "I feel like a wretch condemned to death reprieved at the last moment."

"My own pet!" he replied softly, as he tenderly kissed those lips which were so very dear to him.

A few seconds passed in a delicious silence. But Harry Prescott knew the value of the time and could not allow the precious minutes to be wasted.

"I have so arranged matters," he said, "that in all probability Mr. Graves will not return to Onslow Hall until late to-morrow, as he went up early to-day. Of course there is the bare probability that, on finding himself hoaxed by the telegraphic message a friend of mine sent him, he may come back to-night."

"That was a device of yours, dear Harry!" said Blanche.

"Yes. I could think of no other way to delay the marriage."

"Suddenly she caught sight of the flaming rick."

"Good gracious! there is a fire!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. That's another of my devices; though I must confess it was accidental. It has answered well, though."

"How did it happen, and what is it?"

"I was smoking on a truss of hay," he answered, smiling, "and the rick caught fire. Let us, however, talk about that which is of more vital importance. Will you trust yourself with me once more?"

"I will fly to the end of the world with you, dearest," she answered, looking up into his eyes with a sublime faith.

"Return, then, to the house, put together what few things you will require," he replied, "and having dressed yourself rejoin me here. I will risk the anger of the Court of Chancery. I will dare anything sooner than you should become Mrs. Graves. Ugh! what a name! It makes one shudder to repeat it."

The girl was loth to tear herself away, and Harry had almost to push her from him before she would go.

Having seen her go tremblingly towards the house he leant his back against the trunk of a venerable cedar tree and mused.

The shouts of the men at the fire were audible through the sharp frosty air, and he rejoiced that, owing to their absence, the risk of detection was lessened.

It seemed an age before Blanche returned, comfortably wrapped in furs, and carrying a small bag in her hand, which he instantly took from her.

"Now, darling, take my arm," he exclaimed, "and let us go to the station at once. We shall have to walk to Loudwater, but you must not mind that."

"Oh! no—any hardship, any peril with you," she replied.

They had not proceeded more than half a dozen paces before a hand descended roughly on Harry Prescott's shoulder.

"We are discovered," he cried; adding to Blanche, "Run to the road, I will join you when I have disposed of this fellow."

Drawing back his arm to strike, he beheld in the twilight the countenance of Mr. Onslow, and his hand fell powerless by his side.

"Help!" cried Mr. Onslow. "Stop the girl!—Stop my daughter!"

A couple of men who were in the rear darted forward, and Blanche was soon struggling in the hands of a couple of her father's servants.

Harry was about to rush forward and try to effect her liberation, but Mr. Onslow seized him by the collar of his coat and restrained him.

"Take her into the house, and lock her in a room till I come," exclaimed Mr. Onslow.

"All is lost," sobbed Blanche, as she was hurried past her lover.

A deep groan burst from him.

"Mr. Prescott!" exclaimed Onslow, "you are a villain. A man

who would rob a father of his child, when he knows he cannot contract an honourable alliance with her, is a villain."

"You have no right to make such an accusation, Sir," replied Harry. "Your daughter and I love one another passionately. You wish to marry her to a man she hates and abhors, and you will kill her in six months."

"Stuff and nonsense. My girl is made of sterner stuff," responded Mr. Onslow, incredulously.

"Time will show whether I am right or not, should this iniquitous marriage be consummated," said Harry, in a prophetic voice.

"Go, Sir. But be warned once more. If I catch you trespassing on my ground again, I will let the law deal with you."

"You will consult your own inclination and create a scandal in your neighbourhood."

With this parting shot Harry went away, disappearing in the darkness. Seeking the scene of the fire, he found the groom who had befriended him on so many former occasions. He gave him a hurried scrawl for Blanche, entreating her to keep up her courage, and refuse the man Graves, even at the foot of the altar.

His walk back into Loudwater was a melancholy one.

The inn at which he was staying was quite three miles from Onslow Hall, and close to the railway, though some distance from the station.

When he neared it he was surprised to see a large concourse of people round the entrance; men with lights were darting about in all directions. A babel of tongues arose, and all was confusion worse confounded.

Taking hold of a man's arm, he exclaimed, "What's all this?"

"Haven't you heard?" was the reply.

"If I had, I shouldn't have asked you."

"It's the greatest catastrophe that has ever happened at Loudwater," said the man, who seemed rather proud of the event—as a townsman—than otherwise.

"What is it?"

"The express from London, full of passengers, has run off the line and become a complete wreck. The engine's lying before the inn door, and the inn itself is full of the dead, dying, and wounded. It's just like the eve of a battle, and the inn's no better than a hospital."

"Good God!" ejaculated Harry, pushing forward to gain a nearer view of the wreck of the train.

The landlord saw him and beckoned to him, saying when he got nearer—"There's been an awful accident, Sir. The frost has warped the rails and the engine ran off, breaking an axle, and the carriages are smashed to atoms; at least, that's the account they give of it."

"Are there many killed?"

"We can't tell yet. Only one man absolutely dead has been found, and I hope he may prove to be a solitary victim."

"Can I bear a hand? Is there anything I can do?" asked Harry, in the excitement of the moment forgetting the misery which had formerly possessed him.

"Help those men carry that body, Sir," replied the landlord. "Or at all events drive the people back, and make a lane for them to pass through."

Harry did as he was requested.

Four men were carrying between them the body of a man, which, though shockingly mutilated, still bore the semblance of humanity.

Oddly enough, though the limbs were broken, the face was untouched, and as the light from a lantern fell flickeringly on it, Harry Prescott started back, crying, "Great Heaven! It is Mr. Graves."

An expression of sudden fear distorted the features of the millionaire whom Harry had often met at Mr. Onslow's house.

He was quite dead.

* * * * *

When the grand climacteric of a story is reached, it only wastes the time and wearies the mind of the intelligent reader to spin the yarn any further.

The merest tyro in tale reading will come to the inevitable conclusion that Blanche Onslow married Harry Prescott.

So she did; and Mr. Onslow, in forgiving Harry, and placing his daughter's hand in his, exclaimed, "Take her, my boy, and may God bless you both! I think you will be happy. I am sure I hope you may."

Whether this is a bad or a good story I am not prepared to say.

In *Tristram Shandy* we are told that "it was Yorick's custom, on the first leaf of every sermon which he composed, to chronicle down the time, the place, and the occasion of its being

preached : to this, he was ever wont to add some short comment or stricture upon the sermon itself — seldom, indeed, much to its credit. For instance, ‘This sermon upon the Jewish dispensation—I don’t like it at all;—though I own there is a world of water-landish knowledge in it;—but ’tis all tritcal, and most tritcally put together.—This is but a flimsy kind of composition. What was in my head when I made it?’

“—*N.B.* ‘The excellency of this text is that it will suit any sermon;—and of this sermon—that it will suit any text.

“—‘For this sermon I shall be hanged—for I have stolen the greater part of it. Doctor Paidagunes found me out. ¶ Set a thief to catch a thief.’”

If the author is to be hanged for this story, he will be hanged for its originality, not having stolen a single line of it; which, some will say, accounts for its being somewhat below par.

V.—TRUSTING TO CHANCE.

THE little village of Esketh is pleasantly situated upon the coast near an important sea-port in Essex. It is not necessary to mention the name of the sea-port; suffice it to say that it is celebrated for its smoked haddocks and dried herrings. A few years ago Esketh was by no means a wealthy place; it may have improved within that time, though the fact is more than doubtful. The principal inhabitants were those who owned fishing-smacks and employed men to catch fish, with which they supplied the wants of the wholesale dealers at the sea-port town. Half a dozen gentlemen had as many estates in the vicinity; and they, with the tradespeople, labourers, and smack owners, constituted the entire population of the village.

Esketh had its doctor, although it did not support a lawyer, which showed that the people laboured under difficulties that were rather physical than legal in their nature.

The doctor was a man of the name of Merridew; he had a wife, a son, and a daughter. The son, Harold, was just turned seventeen; he assisted his father, to the best of his ability, in the surgery, but his ambitious nature pined for more active employment. He longed to be a doctor, but not like his father; to minister to the wants and cure the diseases

of the poverty-stricken inhabitants of a country village was not sufficient for him. He was desirous of becoming an aristocratic physician in Mayfair or some kindred locality. The poverty of his father, owing to a lack of practice, constrained him to keep his son as an assistant in the surgery.

At the death of an aunt a change fortunately took place in Harold Merridew's fortunes. The old lady thought sufficiently well of her nephew to leave him in her will the sum of one thousand and ten pounds for three years, at the expiration of which time it was to go to the hospital for incurables. There was also a proviso, to the effect that if Harold did not prepare himself for the profession of a physician, the money was to lapse after he had enjoyed it for one year. Although these terms were harsh enough, in all conscience, to divest the legatee of all gratitude, Harold was only too glad to accept them. The few pounds a year, or a quarter, which his father could spare, when added to his aunt's munificent donation, would, he thought, be amply sufficient for an economical young man. He made a thousand plans for his sojourn in London, the basis of all of which was the most complete abstemiousness, and an utter negative of self.

Finding that his son was bent upon following the liberal profession of medicine, Mr. Merridew threw no obstacle in his way, but gave him all the assistance he could. With a sum of money in his pocket, so trifling in amount that most medical students would have laughed it to scorn, Harold took leave of his parents and went to town. He had on a coat, which, like that of the son of the patriarch, was of many colours; his mother, good soul, had sewn several pieces of cloth together, and so made the fantastic garment in which her Joseph went to seek his fortune. No one in Esketh had seen anything peculiar in the coat, which was more like one of their own patchwork quilts than anything else; and had they done it is unlikely that they would have had the audacity to laugh, for Harold, being the son of a gentleman, had good blood in him, would not put up with an insult, and knew well how to hit from the shoulder.

Having determined to go upon strictly economical principles, Harold went early in the morning by a parliamentary train. He had no introductions, for his father had no friends. Being entirely thrown upon his own resources, the young man felt an increased amount of self-reliance, and having arrived in town, actually made his way, by dint of enquiries, to the hospital which his father had walked, and at which he intended to

practise the art of surgery. Here he was well received, made the necessary enquiries, and paid the necessary fees; then, acting upon the advice of one of the subordinate officials, he proceeded to look for lodgings in one of the small streets in which the vicinity of the hospital abounded. His luggage he had left at the cloak-room belonging to the railway station; it consisted of one plain deal box, with the letters "H. M." printed in ink upon the lid; *item*, one carpet bag; *item*, hamper containing a supply of creature comforts, which his estimable mother had not neglected to provide him with. His self-reliance and possession was astonishing in one so young; he walked from house to house, calling at those in the windows of which were bills displayed, but he had some difficulty in finding anything that would suit him. The landladies, who had had some experience in medical students, did not seem to be very highly impressed with him; and many a furtive joke was made at the expense of his parti-coloured coat, which excited the derision of more than one errand boy, familiar with the strange costumes occasionally to be met with in the streets of London.

At length Harold met with a bed-room and sitting-room on the ground floor, at the house of a Mrs. Selwin, a widow, who, seeing that he was young and from the country, anticipated a rich harvest, in the shape of perquisites and undue charges. Being a practical woman, Mrs. Selwin thought it was only prudent to lower her rent a few shillings, in order to make sure of her "lamb;" she resolved that the loss should soon be made up, if there was any cleverness in her composition, as she flattered herself there was.

The rooms themselves were dingy enough, and, in addition, dirty. They were, however, considered good enough by Harold, who, in furtherance of his praiseworthy economical resolve, was anxious at once to commence a system of mortifying the flesh, and sacrificing the present to the future. The three chairs which adorned the room denominated the parlour were of ancient design, stuffed and covered with horsehair. Had they been indicted and placed upon their trial for the crime of harbouring insects of a mordacious kind they would have been infallibly convicted. The table was rickety, and had lost a castor. The springs of the arm-chair were broken, and the back was so short, that the nape of the neck rested upon the top, in a manner indicative of speedy dislocation. The windows were begrimed with dirt; the carpet was worn threadbare, as was the hearthrug; the paint on the

wainscoting was greasy and dirty, the paper on the wall being in a similar condition. The state of affairs in the bed-room which was to be the nocturnal abode of our young physician was, if possible, worse than that already described. The furniture was more dilapidated and old world; the bed had a startling way of creaking dismally whenever it had the least excuse for doing so; and, indeed, in the night time every piece of furniture in the place was well known to crack and snap without the slightest provocation whatever; and more than one young man of nervous inclinations had left, on the score of ghosts and goblins, whom they alleged the bottomless pit had spared for a brief space, on purpose to alarm the inhabitants of earth and medical students.

The jug and basin seemed to be perpetually at enmity with one another, for they were cracked, and chipped, and broken in many places. There was a general appearance of soot about the uncarpeted floor, which was owing to a playful way the former occupant had of letting off squibs up the chimney when he came home from evening parties at which he was in the habit of attending, and where the indiscriminate use of alcohol was not only recommended but openly practised.

If Harold Merridew had chosen to pay a few shillings a week more, he need not have become the inmate of such a den as the one I have been at some pains to describe; but he sacrificed his comfort in order to accommodate his purse; and as his means were small, and he steadfastly determined never to run into debt, he cannot be blamed for what he did.

The evening of the day which witnessed his arrival in London, saw him an inmate of Mrs. Selwin's highly attractive lodgings. At the time that Harold Merridew made the desirable acquaintance of Mrs. Selwin that slightly avaricious old lady's only grief was that she couldn't let her drawing-rooms; their condition was only a shade better than that of her parlours. People must live somewhere, and to parody Byron, "A house is a house although there's nothing in't."

After being empty for fully three months, Mrs. Selwin became so furiously desperate that she would have let her rooms without asking for reference, on the grand commercial principle of one week's rent in advance.

It is an old saying that "it never rains but it pours." Mrs. Selwin had scarcely completed her bargain with Harold, and seen that very young gentleman start off for his boxes and worldly goods, than she had an application for her first-floor.

The applicant was tall and slim, his complexion, like his hair, was dark, though the latter was of raven blackness. He wore a moustache, but he utterly despised whiskers and beard. The moustache was twisted and held into position by some viscous compound of the perfumer, and it curled artistically at each end. The applicant's chief amusement seemed to consist in petting and pulling about the right hand side end of his moustache; he was eternally making it assume various shapes; on an average it went twice through the form of every letter in the alphabet every day, besides representing innumerable serpents in possible and impossible positions.

The applicant was well dressed and wore a watch-chain of valuable and intricate workmanship; his appearance denoted that he was a gentleman, and his sharp piercing eye, which darted through you like an electric flash, told you that he was no mediocre person; his hands were delicately white when he removed his gloves, the fingers long and tapering like those of a woman; his features were regular and classic; when he spoke his voice sounded pleasantly in the ears of his listeners; but there was something, I cannot tell what, something hidden, reserved, concealed from every eye, and yet indicating its presence by a variation of countenance, a spasmodic twitching of the limbs and face, which made those who met him for the first, ay, and for the second time, distrustful and suspicious.

Mrs. Selwin was much impressed with the applicant for her first-floor, and she accordingly asked one third more than what she usually asked, and two thirds more than she was prepared to take. He agreed to give it her without a murmur, though it must be confessed he looked around him and upon the furniture with a supercilious air, which seemed to say, "This will suit my purpose for a time, though it decidedly is not what I have been accustomed to." As the applicant stood on the landing of the first-floor, with his stick, a malacca silver mounted and ferruled, elegantly poised, Mrs. Selwin ventured to say, "Am I to consider my apartments engaged by you, Sir, from to-day?"

"Oh! yes, certainly; from to-day at the price you have named," was the reply in an earnest voice, which nevertheless had a painfully sad intonation.

"Thank you, Sir," said Mrs. Selwin. "I am much obliged, I am sure, and will endeavour to give every satisfaction that lays in my power. I've had many gentlemen, the first of gentlemen I may say, who have lodged with me and have found no

fault. They were principally medical men, though I have had barrowmits. May I ask you, Sir, if you are in the medical line ? ”

“ No ; I am not. I am a stranger in London. My wife and myself come to town for the first time.”

At the word wife Mrs. Selwin immediately saw an opportunity of raising her rent ; she said she was not aware the applicant was married, and that ladies were a deal of trouble, therefore she would not think of letting the rooms under such and such a sum, being an advance upon the first demand.

The applicant made no objection to this demand, and so pliable was he in the matter of money that Mrs. Selwin indulged in golden visions and actually saw herself keeping her own carriage.

“ As we are strangers,” continued the applicant, “ it will be difficult to find you a reference at a moment’s notice, therefore I hope a fortnight’s rent in advance will be considered a satisfactory equivalent.”

After some demur, which was hollow and unmeaning in its nature, Mrs. Selwin consented to these terms and the applicant went away. In a couple of hours he returned with a lady hanging on his arm. They had alighted from a cab at the corner of the street ; the lady was very pale, and looked worn and ill ; perhaps she did not live happily with her husband, or they were worried with trouble of a pecuniary nature. It is impossible to make a correct guess, so many causes of harassment being open to those who indulge in matrimony.

Mrs. Selwin with a critical feminine eye remarked that the lady wore a black silk skirt, amply distended by a large crinoline ; well made boots encircled tiny feet ; a white Garibaldi surmounted the dress, which was further draped with an Indian shawl turned inside out, as if the wearer thought the proper side would be too good for so poor a neighbourhood. Her gloves were lavender coloured, sewn with black ; her bonnet was of dark straw elegantly though simply trimmed. The strings were black.

Though pale and fragile as a lily, this woman was beautiful as a goddess. Her hair was of a rich golden hue, abundant and flowing ; she stood in no need of a *chignon*. Her eyes were full and lustrous, their colour hazel, surmounted by delicately pencilled lashes such as Guido loved to study. Her mouth small, with ruby tinted lips.

Her husband called her Mildred, and the name he gave the landlady was Blyth.

At first, Mrs. Selwin wondered why there was no luggage. That they had arrived without any was a singular, if not a suspicious fact. It wanted some hours yet to evening, therefore there was plenty of time for it to arrive. Nor was it any business of Mrs. Selwin's to call the attention of her lodger to this deficiency as regarded bag and baggage.

It was fortunate she had not done so, for in a couple of hours' time the carrier brought a box and a carpet bag. It was a solid, heavy looking box ; at any other time Mrs. Selwin would have thought, so suspicious was her nature, that it contained something analagous to a paving stone and an old saddle; but Mrs. Blyth was too well dressed, and her husband too liberal with his money, to permit her to entertain any such suspicions.

Soon afterwards Harold Merridew, hot and dusty, returned from the station. After half an hour's wrangling he had hired two men at sixpence a piece to carry his luggage. He had hereby saved about four pence in cab hire, and was much gratified in consequence. When his landlady had time to think of him, she brought him a kettle of hot water, set his tea things, provided him with bread and butter, and left him to unpack his hamper. He had tea and sugar, while his mother's thoughtfulness had provided him with a home cured ham, upon which he dined.

Having accomplished the very English operation of dining, he employed his leisure in arranging his clothes in the drawers, and sorting his books. Not being as yet a smoker, he found the time hang rather heavily upon his hands.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Selwin brought him his candle, which was a plain hint to him that he was burning more gas than he had any right to, and that he might go to bed as soon as he liked. This hint was disregarded, and the offer declined without thanks.

"Well, Sir, you may do as you please," said Mrs. Selwin, with that sharp irritative tone of voice so peculiar to the free and independent British matron, whose peculiar weakness is keeping a lodging house. "It is not for me to dictate to you, nor should I wish to do so, though if I had travelled from the country and been further trapesing about all day, I should wish to lay my weary head upon the pillow, and thank Him for all His mercies in a short sweet prayer, such being the teaching of my youth and the practice of my age ; not that I'm much past thirty, but still no gal."

"I certainly feel rather tired, but I could not sleep if I went to bed. I feel strangely restless to-night," replied Harold.

"I feel as I did just before my cousin was drowned in the sea at Esketh. I couldn't rest if I were between the sheets. It is an absurd feeling, but I can't succeed in throwing it off."

"Perhaps, Sir, you're given to drinking of green tea," said Mrs. Selwin, with the air of a woman who has made a discovery. "If I were to touch a grain I couldn't sleep, were it ever so, but would lay and toss upon my bed like a fever, though I'm that dog tired to-night I could go and sleep in a kennel and make no murmur for clean straw. The drawing-room, Sir," she added, waxing confidential, "is a deal of trouble. What with lamb cutlets stewed with cucumber, which it was the lady's fancy, and not bad, as I can prove, having tasted it cold, and what with running to the public at the corner for bottled stout and sodas, it's as much as my legs will do, and if it goes on a servant I must have, if she comes from the workhouse at six shillings a month and extras."

"Who have you up stairs?" inquired Harold, feeling some curiosity to know who his neighbours were. No man likes to live in a lodging house without knowing who his fellow lodgers are. This is the most pardonable sort of curiosity in which people can indulge.

"Very nice people, Sir. *They* don't grumble about spending a shilling, or fight over a penny change out. The lady is as pretty as a picture, and as well made as a marble statter. And what time shall I call you in the morning, Sir, being a nurley bird myself?"

"Seven will be quite soon enough," answered Harold, glad that the courteous old lady was about to leave him to himself at last.

Mrs. Selwin looked pityingly at him for a brief space, as if commiserating him for not being so handsome as the gentleman up stairs. Harold was not altogether prepossessing in appearance. His head was round as a bullet, and set awkwardly upon his neck; his hair was inclined to be red when he did not put some dark coloured grease upon it; his ears were large and so was his mouth; his nose bulged out in the region of the bridge after the manner of the nasal organ of an Israelite, or the beak of a certain kind of bird; his cheeks were fat and puffed; his arms long but wonderfully powerful. His was a masculine frame. The expression of his face, however, was quite sufficient to redeem its peculiarities and ungainliness, for the physiognomist had only to glance at him and go away with the firm conviction that he was an honest man.

When she had finished her pitying scrutiny, the landlady

went away and retired to the lower regions, where she solaced herself with the companionship of her pet cat, and some hot gin and water.

Harold had not enjoyed the solitude of his chamber long before he was disturbed by a knock at the door. "Come in," said he, and a tall handsome man entered.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed. "But I have just arrived in this house with my wife, and though I have rang the bell I can make no one hear."

"What is it you want?" inquired Harold.

"A few coals ; the scuttle is empty."

"Take mine, I beg."

The stranger did not hesitate. At once availing himself of the offer, he took the coal scuttle, murmured a few words of thanks, and went away with a bow.

When Harold Merridew was alone once more, he felt unusually dull and lonely. It would have been very strange had he not experienced a sensation of loneliness. He was amongst strangers ; all his friends were many miles away. He was thrown upon his own resources, and he experienced that feeling of desolation which comes over most men on making their first start in life.

He wished at one moment that he could roll aside the mists which veiled the secrets of the future, and the next moment he shuddered at the bare idea of the revelation. What was his destiny ? Would he be successful and rise to the summit of his profession ? Would it be his lot to minister to the wants of princes, and heal the ills of kings and princes ? His father was content to go amongst the poor and needy, but he was ambitious, and wished to be thought highly of amongst the wealthy and the titled.

The gas burned gaily, but flickered now and then as if some wind penetrated to the pipe and made it unsteady. Harold watched the brightly burning flame till his eyes ached, then he had fell upon his outstretched arms which were placed upon the table, and he sank into an absorbing reverie.

Father Time appeared to him, and tore the mask from his hideous skeleton face, and a series of dissolving views passed before him. Poverty, penury, and hard work, were the ground work, but wealth, position, and gratified ambition capped the pictorial edifice.

Eleven o'clock boomed and banged out of a church steeple, letting the inhabitants of the district know that it was time for all good citizens to be in bed, if not asleep.

Scarcely had the vibration of the last died away, than something fell from the ceiling with a dull splash, upon the back of Harold's outstretched right hand.

The young man jumped up with a start, and feeling something wet and slimy on his flesh, looked at the back of his hand, thinking that a water bottle had been upset in the room above, and that some of its contents had penetrated through the ceiling.

With a cry of affright and dismay, he saw that the fluid upon his hand was not water; it was of a deep red colour, and if he had ever in his life seen blood, that which he was looking at was no other. Raising his left hand he dabbled one of his fingers in it, and then looked up at the ceiling to see from whence it came.

Scarcely had he done so before another drop fell upon his forehead. Dashing this away with the back of his hand, he moved on one side, and saw that the immaculate purity of the ceiling in one particular place was gone for ever. The white-wash was stained with blood, which oozed slowly through from the floor above. Presently the ruby drops fell thick and fast like rain.

What was the meaning of this horrid shower? What inexplicable mystery lurked behind it? With a wild cry, half stunned with horror and half stupified with terrified amazement, he fell back into an arm chair.

He endeavoured to cry out, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. It was an impossibility. While he was thus oppressed with a conviction that some frightful calamity had taken place a hurried footstep was heard in the passage, as if someone was darting through it with great rapidity. The next instant the door opened, being almost immediately afterwards slammed violently.

Someone had gone out.

Harold now commanded himself sufficiently to get up. Once on his legs his first act was to rush to the bell, which he rang in such an absurdly energetic way that he very nearly caused Mrs. Selwin to choke, she being in the act of swallowing part of her third tumbler of spirits and water.

The landlady's impression was that the young gentleman had either taken sudden leave of his senses, or that an over-indulgence in ham had caused him to suffer from bad dreams, which had disturbed his serenity.

Without any delay she ran up stairs, and, having opened the door, was astonished to see the alteration which had taken

place in Harold's face. His eyes were starting from his head ; his lips were parted ; the pallor of his cheeks was ghastly ; his head was outstretched in the direction of the ceiling, from which the sanguinary fluid was still dropping.

If Mrs. Selwin was shocked at first, she was now literally astounded.

"What—what is the matter ? " she gasped.

"Look !" was all that Harold could reply.

"Where does it come from ? "

"The room up stairs. Something dreadful must have happened. Pray come up with me. This is awful ! awful ! "

Mrs. Selwin saw the value of this advice, and hastened to follow it and Harold at the same time.

Harold led the way with a brave determination that was worthy of high praise. He hesitated an instant at the drawing-room door, but summoning up his resolution he turned the handle, and found that the lights had been extinguished and that all was in darkness.

Mrs. Selwin ran down stairs, returning with a box of matches ; the gas was soon lighted, and then Harold's startled eyes roved round the room, encountering a dreadful sight for one so young to meet with.

The nerves of many a strong man might have been shocked at it, and shattered for ever.

Upon the floor a young lady was lying ; a desperate blow had been inflicted upon the side of her head with some blunt instrument. From this the blood was flowing.

When Mrs. Selwin saw the extent of the injury, she thought that the young lady was dead, and began to weep and wail as if all was over. Harold did not come to the same conclusion, and he was desirous of summoning medical attendance, which was by no means scarce in the neighbourhood.

"For Heaven's sake rouse yourself !" he exclaimed in a quick voice ; "this is not the time to give way, indeed it is not ! Do you not know some doctor about here ? It is quite necessary that one should be fetched at once."

"Poor dear young lady !" sighed Mrs. Selwin. "I never could abear her husband, from the first moment I set eyes on him. Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! what a sad thing ; and in my house, too ! Well, it'll be a shilling a head after the coroner's sat ; for nobody shan't come in for nothink, and feast their heyes, and see the room in which the bloody deed was done."

"Will you go for a doctor, Mrs. Selwin ? I am ashamed of you !" cried Harold, justly indignant.

"Oh ! poor dear, it's little good doctors can do her, I am thinking ; but I'll go, for it's only proper we should do all we can. So young and beautiful, poor dear ! What a world we live in !"

Mrs. Selwin, having delivered herself of this remark, slowly descended the stairs and went into the street. Three doors lower down, on the opposite side of the way, dwelt a young gentleman who had been a medical student, but that very day he had been emancipated from the thralldom of pupilage, and received a diploma, or as it is facetiously called, "a licence to kill." There was, as may be supposed, high revel in his rooms, which were one blaze of gas. Mrs. Selwin had heard that he was duly qualified to practise, for landladies will talk over their lodgers' affairs to one another, and she thought that he was, in an emergency like the present, a fit and proper person to attend to poor Mrs. Blyth, who was lying desperately injured upon the floor of the drawing-room.

When Mr. Price Blessington heard that he was wanted he went down stairs into the hall, and listened with ill-concealed excitement to Mrs. Selwin's story. He saw himself in the newspapers, and thought that such an auspicious beginning augured success of no mean order in the future.

He ran up stairs to ask his friends to excuse him, whispering to one of them, in a mysterious way, the magic word "Murder !" then he darted away, and accompanied Mrs. Selwin across the street.

In the meantime Harold had sat down upon the floor and taken Mildred's battered head upon his knee, doing all he could to stop the hæmorrhage. How he execrated the cowardly ruffian who had been guilty of such an atrocious outrage ! How he wished that he had him there on the carpet, standing before him and within reach of his two fists ; what a pummelling he would have received ! What a tremendous castigation would have been all his own !

When he looked at the poor pale face, and on

" Her graceful arms in meekness bending
Across her gentle, budding breast,"

he felt that he could willingly give up all hope of advancement in his profession in order to follow up the dastardly wretch who, he was afraid, had sent so lovely a being as Mildred to her grave long, long before her time. If he could only have hounded him down, and hunted him to the foot of the gallows, he would have died happy ; at least, he thought so during the

brief space he was nursing her head during Mrs. Selwin's absence.

At length Price Blessington arrived, and having made a cursory examination of the patient, shook his head. The pulse appeared to have ceased to palpitate, while the action of the heart was certainly in abeyance. Nevertheless, he bound up the head with the usual surgical bandages, and recommended her instant removal to the hospital; it was a grave case, and he thought it would be better for the house-surgeon to attend to it. Mrs. Selwin made no objection to this plan, and the beautiful Mildred, struck down so suddenly and so strangely, was removed to the hospital, where the surgeon in charge declared she was beyond mortal aid, and had her consigned to the dead-house.

There was some lingering suspicion in Price Blessington's mind that the vital spark might not be altogether extinct. Being a great man for experiments of any kind, he spoke to a man who kept the key of the house, and borrowed it, stating that he should probably have some use for it before morning.

He then went back to his friends, invented a plausible excuse for dismissing them, and returned to the dead-house. He lighted a candle, and, opening a box of instruments and taking a package of chemicals from his pocket, he began his experiments.

The dead-house was a horrible and ghastly place. In form it was something like a slaughter-house. Trestles were placed in various positions on the red brick floor. It was occupied by five bodies, including that of Mildred. Price Blessington did not seem at all afraid of his silent companions. Poor dumb wretches! they could do him little harm. Utterly oblivious was he of them, as he proceeded with his experiments.

One o'clock struck.

Two hours and a half had elapsed since Mildred was foully attacked. Taking the body in his arms, he placed it in a sitting position with its back against the wall. Throwing his handkerchief on the ground he knelt upon it, and undoing the sleeve of her dress, laid bare her exquisitely white and rounded arm.

Making an incision with the blade of the lancet just below the shoulder, he waited anxiously, very anxiously, for the blood to flow; if he could only induce the sluggish current to move, he had some hope of bringing her back to that life which she seemed to have quitted for ever.

In the midst of his experiments he could not help thinking how very lovely she was. A strange and romantic idea entered this young man's mind. He did not know who or what Mildred was, but he somehow or other took a great interest in her, and wished to establish some hold over her gratitude if not her affection. If she were really dead, to entertain such an idea was little short of insanity, but until his experiments had failed he would not confess that he was a mistaken visionary.

A short cry escaped him as he saw, with the most unbounded satisfaction, that the blood was beginning to move. A drop of thick black blood fell on the ground, followed by another and another; it was enough for the young doctor, who instantly forced some strong stimulants down the girl's throat. Soon afterwards a very feeble pulsation was perceptible in various parts of the body.

She was not dead.

Having satisfied himself of this fact he packed up his instruments, and sitting down on a trestle began to revolve a scheme in his mind.

"There are plenty of bodies here," he said to himself, "and two of them are those of women. They are poor and friendless. No one will think of claiming them. Who will be able to tell that a change has been made? Yes, yes, it is to be done, and I will do it."

He immediately left the dead-house, and sought the porter in whose charge it was. Having succeeded in awaking him, he made him dress himself, and said—

"Giles, I want one of the bodies in there. Here's a sovereign for you. I suppose there's no objection?"

"Well, Mr. Blessington," replied Giles, pocketing the sovereign, "if you want it I suppose you must have it, although you know that it's strictly ag'in the rules; and if you are to have it, now's the time to take it. I don't believe anyone but myself knows the exact number of corpses there is, and I shan't 'oller."

"Very well. Now I shall want a cab; do you understand? Get me one just outside the hospital gates. Get a decent sort of fellow upon whom you can rely; he shall be well paid for his trouble."

"You leave that to me, Sir," said Giles, putting on his hat. "I haven't been a porter at St. Barleymews for twenty-five years odd without knowing a thing or two. You trust me and you won't be let down. Did you say there was another sufferin

to top this one to-morrow, Sir ? ” he added with a knowing look.

“ I’ll see. If the thing comes off all right, I don’t mind half.”

“ Right you are, Sir. I’m off. Just keep your ear open for three knocks on the door, and then open.”

Saying this Giles walked softly away, and Price Blessington went back to the dead-house. He had brought a blanket with him from Giles’s bed-room. This he threw on the ground, placing Mildred upon it. Then he carefully and delicately unfastened the skirt she wore, and taking it off, placed it upon the body of the best looking woman in the place. This was to mislead those who might come to identify her.

This resulted in a strange complication, as will presently be seen.

Giles procured a cab, and just as Price Blessington had finished his preparations and completely wrapped up Mildred’s body in the blankets, three taps were heard at the door.

He opened it.

Giles on tiptoe, as if fearful of arousing the dead, with his finger on his lips as if to enjoin silence, entered.

“ Is this the particular corpus on which you have set your affections, Sir ? Cos if so the vehicle’s ready, and I’m your ’umble servant,” he said in a tone of levity which would have disgusted anyone but a doctor, whose business and profession it is to become familiar with disease and death, those twin and terrible enemies of frail humanity.

“ That is it,” replied Blessington, pointing to the blanket. “ Take hold of the feet carefully. I will carry the head. It is a dark night, but I flatter myself you and I know our way about here blindfold.”

“ Blindfold ! Ah ! I believe you. If you was to set a eagle to pick out my eyes I could walk about this ’orspital as well as ever, and never run up against nothing. I aint been five and twenty year odd at St. Barleymews for no good at all. Oh ! no. Ease up the head a bit, Sir. That’s it. Now then, are you ready ? ”

“ Ready,” replied the young doctor, leading the way. The cab was reached, and the burden deposited inside with as much care as possible. Price Blessington spoke to the cabman in a low tone for a few minutes, then he got inside and was driving swiftly away.

“ Well,” muttered Giles, as he returned to the gates and halted near the porter’s lodge, “ our young gents have strange fancies,

but we turn out good docs nevertheless. P'r'aps Mr. Blessington will be up to some fine operation afore mornin', and then he'll be 'appy. But look 'ere, I'm better nor what he is, for I'm 'appy urredy. Cos why? I've got the skin he give me, and there's another coming to-morrow. That's 'appiness; money's 'appiness, cos it buys 'appiness. And now I think I'll turn in and have forty winks. Oh! stop, I must shut up the dead-'us afore I go to bye-bye, or some of 'em might be gone afore mornin'. Our young swells are precious thieves."

Just as he was about to lock the gate after this soliloquy a man walked up and said in a tremulous tone of voice, "My man."

"Sir to you," was the reply.

"I think that I am not mistaken when I say that a lady badly hurt, dead, in fact, was brought here an hour ago."

"Werry likely," answered Giles.

"Is—is she dead?" asked the stranger, waiting at the word "dead," as if the pronunciation of the word agitated him strangely.

"Only one corpus has come in to-night, and that one was a woman; and if she wor not dead, bloaters from Yarmouth is livin'," replied Giles.

"I—I *want the body*," said the stranger.

"Blest if I don't think you're all wantin' bodies to-night," cried Giles with a laugh.

"I—I'll give you ten pounds for it."

"You will?"

"Yes! Yes! Fifteen—twenty!"

"Come, that's business; you're improvin'," said Giles, looking through the bar of the gate at him. "What do you say to thirty?"

"Thirty?"

"Yes, that's my figure."

"You shall have it. Take this as an earnest of my good faith."

Giles grasped a purse filled with gold and was satisfied.

"You will do it?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, like a shot. What is she like?"

"Black silk dress, very beautiful. There, that's enough. I can't give you any further description, and—look here, just cover it up in something. *I don't want to see the face.*"

"Oh! that's conwenient, werry," muttered Giles. "I'll give him the first I come to."

"You wait here," said Giles, "and I'll bring you what you want in five minutes."

The stranger had a cab waiting for him. During the absence of the porter he passed up and down in a state of the utmost excitement ; events that night were multiplying themselves in the vicinity of time honoured St. Barleymew.

By his skill Price Blessington continued to restore Mildred to life ; but the man who purchased the body from Giles the porter was convinced that he had obtained the corpse of the woman he had killed in his blind inconsiderate fury, for it was Mr. Blyth who made the nocturnal application which had so pleased Giles.

Harold felt the sad occurrence very acutely.

Mildred was placed by Mr. Blessington with an aunt and some cousins of his in the suburbs, where she recovered her health, but she would not allow him to communicate to anyone the fact of existence.

One night while out for a walk, Harold met a man who seemed to him to resemble Mr. Blyth ; he followed him for some distance, until he came to a cemetery in a northern part of London.

The man whom Harold Merridew was following entered the cemetery by the aid of a private key, which he left in the lock. He did not dream that he was watched, and seemed perfectly content to shut the gate and pursue his solitary walk through the neatly gravelled walks which permeated every part of the city of the dead.

With a stealthy, cat-like step, Harold pushed the gate open and found himself within the precincts of the cemetery ; the faint light prevailing enabled him to see the tall commanding figure of the stranger, whom Harold fancied he had seen before. The wind howled and blew round the corners of the tombstones, and whistled drearily through the branches of the dismal cypresses, with which many a grave was fringed. A sad and melancholy sight is a graveyard by day, but at night everything that in the light is dreadful becomes intensified, and the sepulchres are more sepulchral, the tombs more dreary, the cypresses more funereal.

The wind, to Harold Merridew's excited fancy, began to talk and moan in its passage, as if departed spirits were reposing on its wings, and were sounding a lament over the wreck of humanity.

The stranger walked slowly towards what appeared to be a handsome mausoleum. It was newly erected, and constructed in an octagon form, being supported by eight pillars of polished marble ; a cupola rested on the top, and this in its turn was

surmounted by a cross, made of what appeared to be burnished copper. A glance sufficed to show Harold that no expense had been spared, and that the monument had been designed and executed by skilful and competent hands.

The time permitted him to examine the structure was not long, for it behoved him to keep his eyes fixed upon the stranger, who walked round the tomb until he arrived at a small door leading into it.

This door he unlocked with what seemed to Harold to be a golden key, at all events it glittered and glistened in the pale dim moonlight. Harold's heart beat quickly as he caught a glimpse of the interior of the tomb. When the door, which opened inwards, was placed ajar, a softened, subdued, religious sort of light darted forth and lit up the surrounding grass, which was dotted here and there with what has been poetically described as "marmoreal satires on worthless lives." The gush of light nearly blinded him; he shrank at once into the shade, wondering whether the stranger would close the door and lock it on the inside, or leave it closed without locking it.

The latter was the course he chose to adopt. He evidently thought that at that time of night he was secure from interruption.

Harold remarked that a little path was worn on the grass leading up to the door of the tomb, which made him suppose that the stranger was a frequent visitor to this last abode of mortality. The key was left on the outside, and the door was pushed to. Harold walked round and round the marble columns, and was surprised to find a very simple inscription upon a piece of marble, let into one of the stone blocks of which the sides of the tomb were made. It ran thus :

"To the Memory of MILDRED
This Edifice is
Sacred."

"Mildred ! Mildred !—what's she no name but Mildred ?" Harold was becoming interested. Was not the name of the lady whose cruel death he wished to avenge called Mildred ?

Was he by some extraordinary chance on the track of the murderer whom he had sworn to bring to the gallows ?

He sat down on the moist grass, and resting his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, reflected. Ever since Mildred's death, ever since that awful spot of blood dropped with a dull plash on his hand from the ceiling of his room in Mrs. Selwin's house, he had panted to avenge the wrong which had

been inflicted on, in his opinion, the most beautiful woman that the beneficent hand of nature had ever created. Since then—since that memorable night, he had panted to be a knight-errant—a Quixote—an Amadis de Gaul.

After reasoning some time he came to the very natural conclusion that the man who had gone into the tomb was the murderer of Mildred.

Perhaps he had killed that paragon of female beauty in a moment of insanity, or when the full blood of awful passion was sweeping through his brain with irresistible force. After the commission of the crime came remorse, at least so reasoned Harold, and the result of this remorse was the erection of the magnificent mausoleum in which, as he supposed, the remains of Mildred now rested.

It was certainly rash of Harold to glide up to the door leading into the tomb, but he was not altogether master of himself; he fancied that the finger of Providence had guided him to the midnight haunt of the remorse stricken wretch whose soul was so deeply dyed with guilt. With him, to avenge Mildred's death was as fixed a mania as any that ever consigned an enthusiast to Bedlam, or a brain deluded creature to the dreary precincts of St. Luke's.

He hesitated a few minutes before he entered the tomb, and during this period he nerved himself for what was to ensue. His blood coursed quicker through his veins, which stood out on his forehead, filled and swollen with the rushing current like knotted cords, his hands clenched themselves together and a demoniacal fury took possession of him.

With a rude push he flung back the door on its hinges and stalked haughtily into the dimly lighted depths of the tomb. The stranger was kneeling on the ground. His face was buried in the shadow of the cold stone of a sarcophagus. He was absorbed in silent grief. A subtle essence struck upon Harold's senses, and he was conscious of the existence of a perfumed censer swinging from the ceiling, and emitting the fragrance of myrrh and frankincense. In the centre of the tomb was a broken cross, on the jagged arm of which hung a lamp, by the aid of whose rays the apartment was illumined. At the north end where the stranger was kneeling was the sarcophagus above alluded to; it was made of some dull coloured stone, richly cut and cunningly designed. In this, doubtless, the bones of Mildred, to whom the tomb was erected, were reposing. The floor was paved with encaustic tiles, upon which Harold's boots clanged harshly. Heavy pall-like masses of black

velvet fell on all sides from the dome in the centre, and draped the walls.

The stranger sprang to his feet and glanced angrily around him when made aware of the presence of an intruder. Harold no sooner saw him standing up than he retreated to the door ; not with fear, however ; he was as brave as a lion, and as steadfast as a rock. He could have fought Saladin and all his warriors had they been accomplices in the murder of Mildred. He fancied that if the door was left open the murderer might escape, so he shut it fast and close, and placed his back against it.

"Who are you ? and why do you intrude upon my privacy and my grief ?" cried the stranger in a deep voice.

"Have you so soon forgotten me ?"

"Oh ! you were at the gambling house, I remember. You have followed me, I presume, as much out of curiosity as anything else ? It was not a very gentlemanly thing to do, but as you have been guilty of the act I pardon you freely, and feel sure that I have only to ask you to leave me to myself to ensure compliance with my request."

Harold Merridew stood still, never offering to move, and wearing a defiant smile upon his semi parted lips.

"Will you go, Sir ?" cried the stranger, losing the patient air which had characterised him while speaking hitherto. "I am at a loss to understand your behaviour. You intrude yourself unasked, and persist in boring me with your insufferable presence, when I am desirous of paying a tribute to the dearly loved and much revered memory of one——"

"Whom you murdered."

Had the shock of an earthquake convulsed the cemetery to its foundation, the stranger could not have been more astonished than he was when he heard what Harold had to say. His face blanched, his firm demeanour vanished, his knees knocked together ; his very features seemed to stiffen, and looking pale and exhausted he sat down upon the massive slab covering the sarcophagus and looked at Harold waving his arm feebly, as if desirous of warding off an enemy.

A ferocious gleam of satisfaction lighted up Harold's face as he saw the effect of his announcement. If he had made an error the man would not have been so totally overcome and prostrated as he seemed to be.

"Whom you murdered," repeated Harold, "in a most cruel and barbarous manner. Let me throw off what little disguise I may have preserved up to this time. I was in the same

house; her blood fell upon my hand and cried to me for vengeance, of which I swore I would make myself the instrument, and I have done so. For a long, long time I have anxiously waited for this hour, and now that it has come let me crush you with the assurance that when you leave this place you will do so in my custody, with the immediate prospect of being handed over to the authorities, so that they may do as they like with you. Providence works out its ends in a mysterious way. I have succeeded better than I expected, and having succeeded, and knowing that Mildred is avenged, I am content."

"My friend," said the stranger, "you are not mistaken. I know frankly that I am guilty of the death of the lady who lies in that tomb."

He pointed solemnly to the sarcophagus; his demeanour was sad and earnest, but he was much calmer and more collected than he had been. He looked like a man who has made up his mind to a particular course of action. It was a pity that Harold did not notice the snakelike cunning which scintillated from his eyes, but he did not, and so in the end he had to bear the consequences of his inattention.

"You confess it?" cried Harold Merridew gleefully; "you own that you were the—the person who took Mrs.—Mrs. Selwin's lodgings under the name of Blyth, and that very evening so battered the head of the poor lady as to cause her death,—you confess all this, and pay a tribute to my penetration and my judgment?"

"I do all that," said Blyth, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground, "but you judge me harshly; the murder was committed by me in a moment of hasty and ungovernable passion; when it was over I was the first to regret my precipitancy. Witness my subsequent actions. I took the body away from the dead-house of the hospital, and having it buried at this spot erected this tomb to her memory."

"That is not sufficient atonement; you must expiate your crime with your life. Oh! the old law of the Levites, the Mosaic code of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—is excellent. Come, time presses; I cannot allow you to remain here. The police must deal with you; come!"

"I am willing to accompany you," replied Blyth resignedly, "but before we go let us commune with our own hearts at this shrine; I loved her when alive, you love her memory. You cannot make any objection to so simple a request."

Harold, unsuspecting as a child, knowing no more of the

world's ways and the wickedness there is in men's minds than a baby, made no objection to his proposal. He thought the request a touching one and was glad of an opportunity of saying a prayer in a knightly way at Mildred's grave. He knelt, and was agitated by pure and tender emotions, when he was startled by feeling some long and sinewy fingers encircling his neck, while a voice—oh! how different to that which had formerly enchained his attention—hissed in his ears.

"Fool! Did you think that I was to be cozened and captured by a silly boy? Your penetration may be admirable, but you will find that it has done you little good. Had you minded your own business this would not have happened to you."

Taking Harold up in his arms he dashed him violently against the sarcophagus, and saw him fall, stunned and bleeding, upon the richly tiled floor.

"Lie there and rot!" he muttered beneath his teeth. "Pay the penalty of your folly!"

When Harold had quitted the position he had taken up near the door a sudden gust of wind blew the door open, and Blyth remarked that sundry grey particles of light appearing on the verge of the horizon indicated the approach of day. Taking one glance at Harold's bleeding body, which had more of contempt than pity in it, he left the tomb, carefully locking the door after him. Then he walked rapidly away in the direction of the cemetery gates, omitting to notice as he went that a diminutive urchin, humpbacked, misshapen, and distorted, was crouching under the branches of a cypress and eyeing him curiously.

This ungainly creature might by the superstitious have been taken for the familiar demon of the place.

When Blyth's back was turned he rose to his feet and chuckled, wildly flinging his elfin arms about as a bird might flap his wings.

Then he crept stealthily up to the door of the tomb and pried curiously through the keyhole into its hidden depths.

* * * * *

Mildred was the daughter of a gentleman whose means were moderate. He had served his country during the best years of his life, and his country, being grateful, had rewarded him generously by giving him a few shillings a day to live upon when he was too old to serve it any longer or susceptible of learning a new trade or profession.

She had been sought in marriage by the man who sub-

sequently endeavoured to murder her. All she knew of him was that he was named Blyth, and that she was foolish enough to surrender her heart to him without reserve. He had hinted that he would some day be rich. Of his family she knew nothing ; she married him against her father's consent, and she lived to repent having done so.

He took her to London and stayed at an hotel. One day he introduced her to a friend whom he addressed as Sir Spencer Harewood. This gentleman paid Mildred great attention. Blyth fancied that she encouraged his addresses, and Mildred could only suppose that jealousy arising from this cause had driven him to the commission of the shocking deed which so nearly proved fatal, and went within an ace of depriving her of her life.

When she left the shelter which the kind friends of Price Blessington afforded her she thought it incumbent upon her to visit her father, whom she had not seen since her marriage with Mr. Blyth. Accordingly she went to the suburbs of London in which he resided and was surprised beyond measure to learn that he was dead.

With the exception of some distant relations with whom she had never been on friendly terms, she had no one to go to. Upon the kindness of Price Blessington and his friends she felt that she had trespassed too long, and she could not persuade herself to do anything but work for her maintenance, and struggle honestly against the world.

Her object was to find out her husband and so work upon him as to disabuse his mind of the suspicions he entertained, and induce him to love her with the fondness he had once assumed, and most probably felt. She loved him, and would continue to love him under any circumstances. A woman's love is always a strange problem and difficult of solution, and it was assuredly strange for her to love Blyth, after the cruel and barbarous manner in which he had treated her. But she did love him, and would have given the world had it been hers to give to have met him once more and had an opportunity of satisfying him that she lived and loved.

To discover her husband and accomplish the miracle, as Price Blessington called it, of winning back her husband's love and making a good and altered man of him, was undoubtedly the object of her life, and to do this she was prepared to suffer and sacrifice much.

Her first step was to go to a governesses' institution, and obtain a situation in a good family. Mr. Blyth was a man of

fashionable pursuits and connections, and she fancied that she might meet him or hear of him in some way sooner by being in St. James's than by sojourning in St. Giles's. If she could only come in contact with or hear of Sir Spencer Harewood, it would be a clue to the whereabouts of Blyth.

She entered upon the duties of her new sphere with a sanguine feeling and a firm hope that did much to render her contented with her situation, and bring back the roses to her poor pale cheeks.

The family in which she found employment was that of Mr. Morton Melville, M. P., a gentleman well known, of some repute as a daring thinker and a splendid political speaker. His wife was a leader *haut ton*, and his daughters Agnes and Caroline were confessedly the *belles* of the season during which they made their *début*, and were presented at court.

They knew that Mildred was well educated and that she was the daughter of an officer in the army, but they did not treat her as an equal. She was in their eyes a dependant, if not an inferior, and she was treated distantly, even by the girls for whom she was engaged as finishing governess and companion. Their good breeding would not allow them to treat her with absolute insult or indignity, but they made her feel that she was not the daughter of an M. P. who was alike talented, wealthy, and of good repute.

Her work was not of an arduous nature. She was expected to learn all the new music, and help the young ladies in mastering the more difficult parts. She read French and German with them to prevent their forgetting their stock of learning, and she was at their beck and call all day long. Sometimes they would take her out with them in the carriage, but not often. As it happened the two Misses Melville were really pretty, and so they were not jealous of Mildred's good looks.

Time passed and the London season was drawing to a close. There was a flower show at South Kensington. Agnes Melville wished to go, and her sister being indisposed she told Mildred that she would be glad of her society.

The carriage quickly drove them to the gates and they entered together. Mr. Morton Melville had promised to meet his daughter in the garden. He talked gaily to Agnes, but only addressed a few remarks to Mildred, whom he looked upon as an incumbrance.

"We did not expect you so soon, papa," said Agnes. "The House was 'up' sooner than we expected, my dear," replied the member of parliament. The debate was not a very interesting

one. Morning sittings seldom are, and Englishmen are not usually very eloquent upon the question of Landlord and Tenant as applied to Ireland. What a throng! We have arrived in the midst of the crush. Is that the Queen? Bless me, yes. Stand a little on one side, my dear. How well her Majesty looks! Who is that with her? Some German prince, I suppose."

The assemblage made a lane through which royalty was allowed to pass. Mr. Morton Melville lifted his hat as did the other gentlemen present, the ladies bowed, and the Queen returned the salutation with a graceful inclination of the head and a sweet smile, and swept along until she disappeared behind the glittering cascade of a large fountain.

The gay and brilliant crowd moved on, seemingly very little inspired by the condescension of Her Majesty. The Melvilles found many people whom they knew, and were perpetually bowing and nodding.

"Never saw so many people in all my life," said Morton Melville. "The House musters quite strongly. This is P—the Chancellor, and that a little further on is the First Lord."

Going on a little further they came to a walk which, lying a little back, was not nearly so crowded as the main arteries of the garden. In the centre of this they met a very well dressed man, who stared very hard at Mildred for so long a time that his scrutiny was becoming almost rude, when he appeared satisfied, and took off his hat in a marked manner.

Agnes was much surprised. She had no idea that her governess and companion was acquainted with so well dressed and elegant a man as the one who had just bowed to her. Mildred was so agitated that she placed her arm inside that of Agnes, saying in a tremulous voice, "Let me lean on you, Miss Melville, I—I feel a little faint."

"Oh! certainly, you may take my arm," said Agnes, a little stiffly.

The gentleman passed on, halted abruptly as though he wished to speak, and then changing his mind, pursued his way towards the conservatory.

"I was not aware that you were acquainted with Sir Spencer Harewood, Miss Brookland," said Sir Morton Melville, addressing Mildred.

"I have met Sir Spencer," she replied, in a quiet, still, monotonous voice.

What memories the sight of that familiar face called up within her breast! It was through the attention Sir Spencer Harewood paid her that her husband's jealousy was aroused.

It was through him that the attack had been made upon her life, and that a separation which Mr. Blyth thought eternal had taken place between them.

Had Mildred possessed sufficient courage and presence of mind at the moment she would have rushed after Sir Spencer, and have eagerly said to him, "Where is my husband? Tell me, I pray, if you have seen him lately. I will thank you very much if you can furnish me with the information?"

But she was so agitated and overcome, when she ought to have been calm, cool and collected, that Sir Spencer Harewood was lost in the crowd before she had the power of moving.

"I cannot say that I know Harewood," continued Mr. Morton Melville, "but I have seen him at the clubs; he is a man of good family, and very well off. He is a great friend of Lord Walsingdale. By the way, have you seen his lordship in the garden to-day, Agnes? I heard he was to return this week from the continent?"

Agnes Melville replied in the negative, and blushed deeply, which denoted that the name of Walsingdale had a secret charm for her.

Mildred had often heard of Lord Walsingdale. He had in the early part of the season paid Agnes Melville great attention. Some people went so far as to predict that a match would be the result. Walsingdale was, however, compelled (so he said) to leave England and travel on the continent at a moment's notice. He did so, and his return had been anxiously looked for by one at least, and that was Agnes Melville.

For fully an hour afterwards Mildred was compelled to pursue an easy promenade, going round and round a limited area like a horse in a mill. She felt ill and faint, and wished to be at home. For some time Agnes, who did not exactly love her governess, took a sort of malignant pity upon her, and said, "Miss Brookland, papa seems so unwell that we had perhaps better think of turning homewards."

"As you please, my dear, as you please. I see that the Queen has gone, and the foreign ambassadors are on the point of leaving," answered Mr. Morton Melville.

Heartily glad was Mildred to reach her quiet and unassuming little room. Here she passed the happiest part of her existence. It was here that she gave herself up to thoughts of the future; here she made her plans and indulged credulously in all sorts of fancies, the hero of which was always her recreant husband.

When she found him, he was to listen to her reproaches and then accept her forgiveness, after which they were to live

happily once more,—more happily than they had ever lived before,—and he was never to be jealous again.

She made no allowance for alteration. She never dreamed that he was likely to change, and that his vision of love might pass away. She was like a silly moth fluttering round a candle, whose vital flame would inevitably destroy her.

Throwing herself upon a small sofa near the open window, she poured some refreshing essence into a saucer, and dipping the corner of her handkerchief in it bathed her forehead.

"Something tells me," she said, "that I shall shortly see my husband. This meeting with Sir Spencer Harewood was unexpected. It is the forerunner, if I am not mistaken, of a still more momentous event in the eventful history of my chequered life."

The weeks slipped away. Agnes Melville saw nothing of Lord Walsingdale, and Mildred was disappointed in the fond hope and expectation of meeting with her husband. She did not ever come in contact with Sir Spencer Harewood, though she walked in the park and frequented those places where she thought it was most likely he would be.

At length it became necessary to leave London. All those people who had the slightest claim to be thought fashionable quitted the metropolis; some went to the German spas, some to the moors, some to English and foreign watering places. Mr. Morton Melville was an ardent admirer of field sports; he was an enthusiastic fox hunter, and liked nothing better than to tramp over the stubble gun in hand, and dog and game before him.

Invitations were sent to what is called "a secret circle of friends," who assembled by the 12th of August at Falling Dell, an estate of vast size and magnificence in the charming county of Cumberland. The grouse had reason to rue the day on which Mr. Melville and his friends took up their quarters at the Dell, for they fell victims to the double barrel in large numbers.

All invited to Falling Dell were not sportsmen. There were some who liked riding or fishing, could appreciate the charms of croquet, and thought that a morning or afternoon was never misspent in the society of ladies.

There were the cavaliers, the carpet knights who knew well how to talk soft nothings to the fair sex, being utterly unable to see anything interesting in the fact of Colonel so-and-so having made a prodigiously long shot, and thinking the conversation unutterably vapid when it was stated that Lord this

and that had killed thirty-six brace by his own gun, besides a snipe and three hares.

The party at Falling Dell were divided into two sections; the effeminate, or lady killers, the athletes, or bird slayers. Agnes and her sister found much delight in the company of the former party. Lord Walsingdale had made a great impression upon her because of the vast store of varied erudition packed away in his brain. After a few hours' conversation with him she felt how limited her knowledge was, and how little she knew of all that was great and good and useful.

September came and went, yielding a plentiful supply of partridges.

Very gently crept on the winter that year. Christmas was at hand almost before any one dreamed of it. Mildred had passed a very quiet and happy four months at Falling Dell. Her beauty attracted the notice of many staying at Mr. Morton Melville's, and her unobtrusive manner, combined with her ladylike carriage, captivated more than one man, who would have offered his hand and heart to the pretty woman, who came to be called the queen of governesses, but whenever a man dared to whisper words of love to her Mildred assumed an icy demeanour which chilled and repelled him, and made him think her proud and haughty when she was only just and true.

On the 21st of December a heavy fall of snow took place. The thick feathery flakes falling in steady clouds piled one on the top of the other, covered the ground and clothed everything in a snowy vestment. The boughs of the trees, now denuded of their summer garniture, groaned beneath the frozen burden that Dame Nature presented them with.

"Heap on more wood, the wind is chill;
But, let it whistle as it will,
We'll keep our Christmas merry still,"

was the cheery song that issued from Morton Melville's lips. At Falling Dell it could be said with truth,

"Twas Christmas broached the merriest ale,
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale."

The fires were supplied with well dried logs that flared and crackled half way up the chimney; the labourers and tenants on the estate looked forward to bountiful gifts and much good cheer.

"This is very cheery, I like to see this," said Mr. Morton Melville one morning, rubbing his hands before the fire, while Mildred and Agnes were looking out of the breakfast-room

window, and pitying the forlorn condition of the peacocks and the numerous flocks of little birds who were ready to chirp the praises of the charitable donor of a crumb.

"Shall I open your letters for you, papa?" enquired Caroline, who was a very jocund little maiden, a year younger than her sister.

"If you like, Puss," replied her father; "my hands are too cold to break the seals. I don't think I remember such severe weather for some time past."

Caroline Melville, who knew that she was papa's pet, and privileged to do almost anything she liked, took up the leather bag, and dipping in her hand drew forth some letters.

All those who had answered the breakfast bell crowded round her expectantly. She gave them all out, handing them to those ladies and gentlemen to whom they were directed, and having peered into the bag to see that none were left, put on a dismal air, saying, "Poor papa, only one letter for you."

"Poor papa is very glad to hear it, there will be all the less work for him to do," said Mr. Morton Melville with a laugh.

"Make haste, Puss, and open it. Put me out of my misery at once. Is it an application for money, or a request from a confiding constituent that I should procure for his talented offspring a berth in the Customs, or——"

"Now do hold your tongue, papa," said Caroline, holding up her hand deprecatingly, "you make me so nervous, I shall never get to the signature if you talk so."

The little lady, fully impressed with her own importance and the insignificance of every one else in comparison, read the letter demurely. The envelope had a coronet upon it, so that it was evidently from some one of rank. At length she exclaimed,

"The letter is from Lord Walsingdale, papa. He says he has just returned from abroad, and that he has found your letter, inviting him to Falling Dell, at his club. If you will allow him, he will now accept it if not too late—the long and short of it is he will be here to-morrow evening if he does not hear from you, in the meantime cancelling your former invitation; then there are kind regards to Miss Melville, that's Aggy of course, and the rest of our circle, which includes you and me and other humble individuals."

"Do you hear that?" said Mildred to Miss Melville. "Lord Walsingdale arrives to-morrow. We shall have quite a brilliant party."

"Yes," replied Agnes abstractedly.

"I long to see this Admirable Crichton, about whom every one talks. It is not often that one meets with such a paragon."

"No, it is not," Agnes said.

Mildred was about saying something else, when Agnes prevented her by walking to the breakfast table and taking a place near her mother, who presided at that end, devoted to the manufacture of tea and coffee.

The carriage was sent to the station for Lord Walsingdale, who, like the mysterious being in the song of "Excelsior," came "mid snow and ice." The train was late and the dinner nearly over. The ladies had retired to the drawing-room before his lordship descended from his dressing-room, he being one of those exquisite creatures who would not think of sitting down to a dinner table unless in evening dress.

Agnes Melville was in a state of great excitement and expectation, although she did not allow others to notice it. During the hour of banishment and exile, as it has been called, that has to elapse while the gentlemen drink their wine, it pleased the aristocratic Agnes to make a partial confidante of Mildred. It was not often that Agnes the reserved opened her heart to anyone; seldom indeed did it please her to lift the veil of her individuality, but there is a time when the most reserved feel the want of some one to speak to. She drew Mildred into a quiet corner, and sitting down with her on the yielding cushions of a sofa, said in the low and mystic tone of voice usually adopted by young ladies when they wish to be confidential,

"You can imagine, dear Mildred, how anxious I feel, when I tell you that Walsingdale made such an impression on me, that he stole my heart away. He did not declare himself either to me or any of the family, though every one agrees that I made an impression upon him. Do you think he is a flirt and was merely trifling with me? That is what Caroline says whenever she wishes to tease me."

"I have never seen the man," replied Mildred, "therefore it is impossible for me to tell; there are men who make violent love to women, never being serious for one moment."

"God send that he is not one of these!" fervently exclaimed Agnes, clasping her hands together.

"Are you so much wrapped up in him?"

"You may think me foolish if I reply in the affirmative."

"Hope for the best; you are young, well-born, pretty, well

off and accomplished. If he is not fascinated with this catalogue of excellences, he must be exacting and difficult to please."

A noise of footsteps was heard on the stairs.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Agnes, catching her breath. "I shall go near the fire."

"And I, having no wish for display, shall, like a poor country mouse, stay in my corner," said Mildred.

The gentlemen came trooping in one by one and two and two, laughing and chatting gaily. Lord Walsingdale was walking by Mr. Melville's side. He advanced to Agnes to shake her warmly by the hand, saying in warm language how much it pleased him to see her again, and how deeply he regretted the long sojourn abroad which the state of his health compelled him to make. Now that he was once more in England, he hoped that kinder circumstances would permit him to see more of Miss Melville.

Agnes, charmed beyond measure, made an appropriate reply, and they stood chatting gaily near the fire.

Mildred was too far off either to hear Lord Walsingdale's voice or see his face. Being a little curious, she got up and walked into a more civilised part of the room.

The apartment was crowded in the neighbourhood of the fireplace, and Mildred had some difficulty in getting near his lordship.

At length she succeeded in reaching a spot half-a-dozen yards distant from where he was standing talking in an amorous manner to Agnes Melville.

She looked steadily at him, and then uttering a half startled exclamation, rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand, as if she thought they were deceiving her. She had an excellent view of his features. He spoke, and she put her hand to her ear to try to catch his words.

How she stared and gazed at him, as if he were some curiosity or *rara avis*.

All at once, with a sob and a cry, she turned white as a sheet and fell back insensible upon the carpet.

"Poor child!" he said, "the heat of the room has proved too much for her."

"Pray what is all this about?" enquired Lord Walsingdale.

"My governess has fainted, I believe," replied Agnes, with an air of the most supreme indifference.

"Oh, indeed! That, I should imagine, is not an event of any great importance."

Miss Melville laughed, and Lord Walsingdale stroked his tawny moustache and smiled, showing his pretty teeth.

It seemed that had Mildred been dying at that moment the fact would not have interested them much.

What was Mildred to them?

Probably more than either of them at that moment imagined.

Mildred was carried up to bed, but though his lordship did not make any discovery that night he could not fail to do so the next day.

He met Mildred, looking very pale, at breakfast. He stared, but said nothing, and when she quitted the breakfast-room he followed her to the hall.

"Mildred!" he exclaimed.

In an instant she was in his arms.

"Oh! my own," she murmured, "we have met again. I forgive you all."

"All?" he queried, doubtfully.

"Yes, indeed; if I can only be your wife once more."

"We will never part again," he answered earnestly. "But now tell me by what miracle you survived. I fancied that you—but I see that I was deceived."

She told him briefly what had happened. Their joy was complete. Her surprise was great to discover the exalted rank of her husband, and the astonishment of the Melvilles was unbounded when they heard the news.

Agnes did not make any outward sign, but she died a year afterwards, of consumption people said, but Mildred knew her heart was broken.

We must now return to Harold Merridew.

The dwarf who looked through the keyhole of the vault was a son of a gravedigger who lived in one of the lodges of the cemetery; he was considered half-witted, but the fellow was shrewd enough for all that.

He had witnessed the exit of the stranger, and soon contrived to open the door of the vault and release Harold, who handsomely rewarded him.

Some time afterwards he was surprised at receiving a visit from Mr. Blyth and Mildred, whom he could not believe for some time was really in the flesh.

When he was convinced of the fact, and heard Price Blessington's story (the latter being sent for), he forgot his animosity, and consented to forgive Lord Walsingdale for the commission of the one foul blot which stained his escutcheon.

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